Volume I Issue 2 Autumn 1988

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

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Fantasy

Magazine

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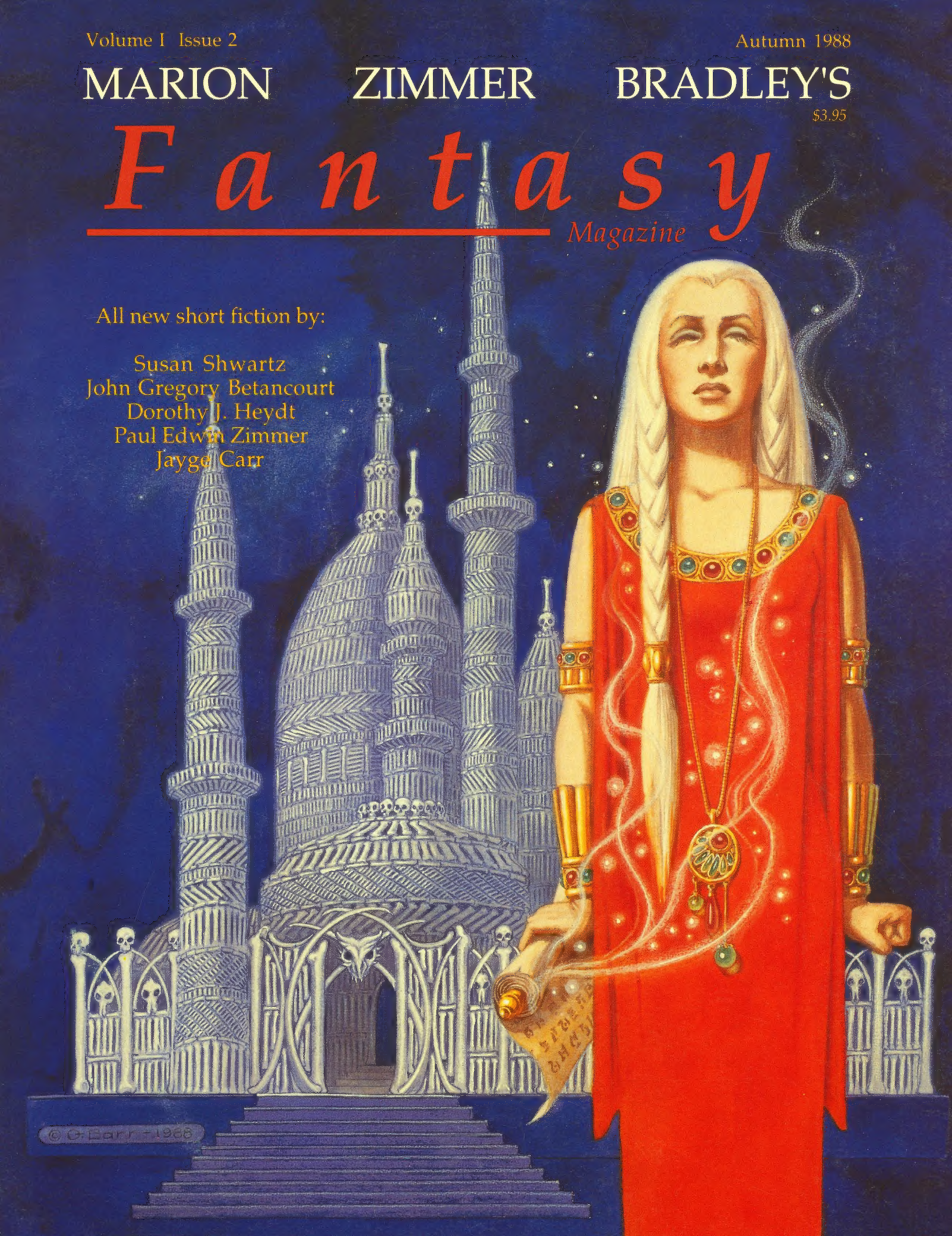

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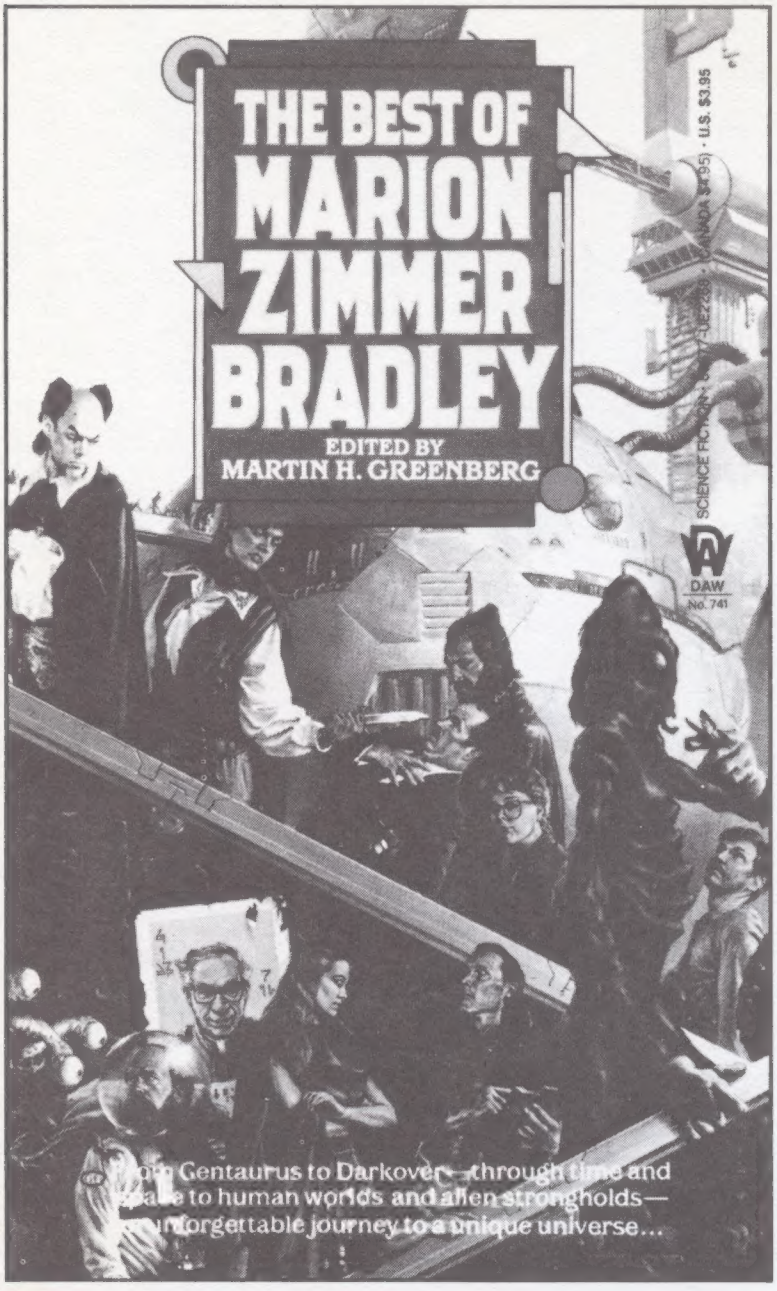

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Happy Halloween,

Our second issue brings imaginative, exciting and humorous stories from authors all over the United States. A new feature in our Editorial Section is the Letters Column. We invite you to write to us with your comments.

The Premier Issue was unfortunately, suspended from circulation to ensure that proper credit was given for an original art work. We have had many requests for copies of our first issue. If you wish to purchase a copy please write to us immediately, send in a subscription form with your request, or ask for one at your favorite bookshop. We will be happy to send them as long as the supply lasts.

❒ *We have tabulated the results of the Cauldron vote. The winner is The Skycastle by Bruce D. Arthurs, (last issue's cover story)! Luck of the Draw by Elizabeth Dobecki, and The Vision by Rachel Cosgrove Payes were second and third, respectively. There were so many complaints from readers that they were unable to choose just one story, that the voting scheme has been revised. Let me know if this is an improvement.*

Happy reading!

Jan Burke

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

Fantasy Magazine

Volume I Issue 2 Autumn 1988

Cover Story— **The Bone Serai** *page 5*

by Susan Shwartz

" Sand lashed even the innermost towers of Ani-Kalimat, but the priestess Mara heard only a whisper that hissed against the carved alabaster screens of her windows. It was louder than..."

Paradox Lost *page 16*

by Dorothy J. Heydt

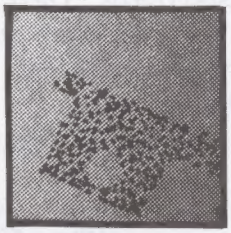
" You might have thought there was the making of a paradox the day Peter Bannister fell through the time hole. He fell from the twentieth century A.D. to the fourth century B.C., and landed with..."

Dreamtime in Adjaphon *page 21*

by John Gregory Betancourt

" Dreamtime came quickly in the last days of Adjaphon, for then we did not know the end approached, and we were drunk from our power and our success. Abroad, our armies marched again, this year in war against..."

The Lady, The Wizard and The Thing *page 31*



by Lynne Armstrong-Jones

" I lifted my skirts as I began up the stairway. I stepped carefully, as there were cracks and uneven places. ...There was something strange about this place. I looked yet again over my shoulder..."

The Vision of Aldamir *page 39*

by Paul Edwin Zimmer

" Hungry things from beyond the World beat against the barrier of mind. Aldamir's thoughts were interwoven with the minds of his kin into structures of pure power: adamant barrier and..."

Mistaking the Dragon Mage *page 52*

by Terry O'Brien

" The Mage was escorted to the tent near the center of the camp. They stopped at the entrance when a quiet but powerful voice called out from within. 'Only our guest. Guards, see that we are left undisturbed.' "

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© Marjory Krueger
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The Bone Serai

by Susan Shwartz

Sand lashed even the innermost towers of Ani-Kalimat, but the priestess Mara heard only a whisper that hissed against the carved alabaster screens of her windows. It was louder than she remembered hearing in the ten years that she had lived in the desert city, priestess and princess, where she had feared to be prisoner or slave.

Best not to think of the sand and the demon storms that lay outside Ani-Kalimat. Instead, she concentrated on the game of Hounds and Jackals that she was playing with Kithe. To give him his full royal title, he was Prince ta-Kithe of Tar-Kalimat, her adopted city's twin and adversary. There were no quarrels as bitter as those between siblings. For five years, Kithe had been a hostage, and no ambassador ever had come to speak of ransoming him home.

Separating the Two Cities was the desert called the Navel, isolated from the world by mountains.

As Mara raised a slender, carved stick for her next move, a staff of office shuddered on the floor outside. Crouched at the window, the boy Jess trembled and retreated behind Mara's chair.

"You cannot say that I didn't predict this," Kithe said.

"I don't believe you," she whispered.

Kithe shook his head. "I pity you, Mara," he hissed. "The City rescued you and trained you. But now they will call in the debt."

The Herald's entrance interrupted him.

Still holding her gamepiece, Mara rose, the severe folds of a priestess' robes emphasizing her slim height. Her sunstreaked hair, longer and paler than the hair of any of the sleek, tanned natives of Ani-Kalimat's sunken gardens, betrayed her foreign birth. A caravan that ventured through the moun-

Bone Serai

tains had dared the Navel and encountered one of the black storms. A later caravan had found one crying child in a train of dead beasts and dead outlanders, and had brought her to the Priest King.

He had been good to her, better, if the truth be known, than he was to his own child.

She sent her thoughts winging into the recess of her mind where she stored her cantrips. All-heal, magelight, pathfinding...there it was! Calm and clear speech. The spell resonated briefly in her mind, a chiming of inner bells; and then she spoke.

"Who enters?"

"Ani-Calagon, King and Priest."

"My Father is most welcome," Mara murmured dutifully. The Priest-King was shorter than she, but stocky. Despite his years as ruler, he maintained the crafty, sinewy look of a desert fighter. More than just the look, she realized. Today, his robes and the leopard-skin of his rank were crusted by sand that drifted down in puffs onto the cool, tiled floor.

At Mara's nod, Jess approached him tentatively. The Priest-King ignored him. Mara cleared her throat. Boy and Priest stared at one another in resignation and some anger, then nodded.

Ani-Calagon hurried, hand and voice, through the usual blessing. "Send them away," he ordered.

"As my uncle commands," ta-Kithe bowed, and stalked out.

"The boy too!"

Jess cast a longing look at his father, splendidly tanned, adorned, and muscled, and with such a fine, resonant voice! Then he scurried after the other Prince.

"There is nothing wrong with the brat's ears or his nose for trouble," muttered the Priest King.

Not for the first time, Mara wondered why Jess never spoke. What had he seen or felt that made speaking so painful to him that he had retreated into a silent world that cost him his father's love?

Kithe, an enemy here and a prisoner, had reason to be suspicious. But that Jess, the priest king's own son, feared him...Mara's palms began to sweat.

Mara folded her fingers harder on her gamepiece and waited, her mind flickering past cantrips toward prayers. Yes, she *had* heard that some wells, among the deepest in the city, had run dry. The water in the *karez*, for yes, she had heard that too, had sunk low in the ancient tunnels that were the city's veins. Her maids had even told her that sandfall had buried half the West Orchard. But Ani-Kalimat had suffered drought before.

Let Kithe be wrong, she prayed, but her prayer resonated in her skull alone. She would have sensed it, had it risen further.

"Last night," the Priest King announced, "patrols found Avar's caravan. Six men left, out of thirty-five!" he burst out angrily as Mara maintained a more or less deferential silence. Then he went on, "Avar saw the Bone Serai."

He held up a clenched hand to forestall interruption. "*This* is not delirium."

From his beltpouch, he drew a desiccated hand, sun-etched finger-bones poking through the darkened skin. He let it fall onto the table between them.

"The Serai thirsts," he told Mara.

She shut her eyes and lips. Sighting the Bone Serai, the caravanserai of ghosts, had always meant disaster, but actually to receive the bones...

"You cannot tell me that you didn't believe that this day might come," Ani-Calagon spoke roughly. "Each day that the sand blows, we have less water. Each year, we have fewer and fewer acres. One day, there may be non; and we will be *dry*, dry as the Bone Serai itself.

"We have been given the sign. Now we must have water."

Water, yes. And Mara knew the way of Ani-Kalimat's old rites. Blood must be poured out on the sand. Traditionally that the task was allotted to an outsider...to her. Since no native of the city save the king might be sacrificed (and he invariable found a substitute), and no subject of it might slay king or substitute, she, the outlander, must kill the prisoners taken and tenderly cared for against such a need.

"You call Kithe 'kinsman,'" she protested.

"And so he is. Who else but one of noble blood will serve our need now?"

A royal sacrifice. If you were truly this City's father, you would bow your own head to the knife. I suppose that we may be glad that Jess is mute and too young.

Ani-Calagon misread her expression totally. "Kithe will bring us much water," he said in a voice that he meant to be impressive but that merely terrified. "Or *you* will. Weight *that* on the watersellers' scales before you protest further." he bowed ironically to her and left, the skirts of his robes sweeping the sand into tiny cousins of the sand devils that ravaged the land.

Mara heard a crack, then winced as pain shot through her palm. The gamepiece had snapped and pierced her hand. She threw the pieces, spattered with drops of blood, onto the table.

Then she went in search of ta-Kithe.

Her eyes filled with tears, and she never noticed when she stumbled and her wounded hands left prints on the glinting, whitewashed walls. Amber light poured through the dusty alabaster window screens. She pushed at them, leaving bloody streaks, but there was no freedom for her, and no trust anywhere. Blood *should* smear the alabaster

and the walls; blood kept the water flowing.

Her footfalls rang as hollow as her trust. Instinctively, her mind sought the spell of path-finding, and it brought her, blinded as she was, to Kithe's rooms. The City had named her priestess and Kithe, kinsman and honored guest. Now, she was sacrificer, and Kithe her victim.

She almost envied him.

Kithe waited at the door, as if listening for her.

"Your hand!"

"Before I slay you," she declared, "I will slash wrists and throat too." He silenced her with a shake.

"I always knew that the chance existed that I'd have to be the Sacrifice. It's a royal death, at least." But he spoke too rapidly, and Mara found herself staring at the tiny muscle that jerked at the right corner of his mouth and at the pulse that beat in his throat.

"I won't kill you," she declared.

"What other way is there?" he asked. "Unless we could escape to Tar-Kalimat. Home..." Longing warred with fear in his voice.

"Would it be any different there?" she asked. For centuries, the Cities had fought the sand, built walls against its drifting into their basins, dug and reinforced wells and the underground karez with innumerable lives, and prayed to be spared the sight of the bleached, thirsty Bone Serai that appeared deep within the Navel, and only to people almost dead with thirst.

Kithe and Jess could imagine no other world. Ani-Calagon wished no other. But Mara...She blotted her hand on her sash and cast her thoughts back. It was hard: she had spent many years trying to be *of* the city in all ways.

Kithe's city might be grateful for his life. But all that meant was that someone else would have to die. Exchanging a victim for a victim was no trade, she thought.

"Mara, let's go home," Kithe blurted. "I know my father would welcome you."

As wife, daughter, or prisoner? Here, odd as it seemed, she and Kithe were friends. What about Jess? The Priest-King had been estranged from Jess since he realized that his son, being mute, could never be his heir.

...she stumbled and her wounded hands left prints on the glinting, whitewashed walls... there was no freedom for her, and no trust anywhere. Blood should smear the alabaster and the walls; blood kept the water flowing.

She looked up, all the shock and loss that Kithe's suggestion aroused in her etched into her face the way that sand etches a rock. *What other choice have you, Mara? To let your friend die? Would* that *be better?*

Slowly, Mara nodded. "I'll come," she said hoarsely, and the fabric of acceptance and gratitude that she had woven since travelers rescued a child crying in the desert, unraveled.

Kithe hugged her exuberantly. His face and arms pleased her well; but she disengaged herself. This was all happening too rapidly. Before anything else, they had best reach Tar-Kalimat. And then what? She would find a home for herself. She would make a home for Jess. Somehow.

Jess came up to them and tugged at her skirts, his dark eyes wide and grave. He pointed to the walls.

"Jess thinks that we could be overheard," she whispered to Kithe.

"Ani-Calagon probably had you tracked here." Kithe's hand clutched her sound one fiercely. "If he suspects you of treason, he might sacrifice the three of us."

Despite the heat, Mara shivered.

"I will return to my rooms," she said, assuming the dignity of a priestess as awkwardly as if it were a cloak that she had outworn. "If I am asked, I shall say that I will obey..." but her mouth dried as she spoke. "Still, we will need food, water, beasts..." Mara suppressed an insane desire to laugh at a sudden vision of her, Kithe, and Jess demanding valuable riding beasts, then heading boldly out the gates.

"I can steal them," Kithe said. "But only if your magics can hide us."

Could they? Magic had always been for study and for joy more than for the rituals of the City. *This much is all your own,* her old teacher had promised her; and thus it had been. Now she would have to use what she had learned for defense and—who knew—possibly for counterattack.

"I shall come for you both tonight," she told her friends.

The Hand still lay on the table, dried palm beseechingly upward when she returned to her apartments.

Bone Serai

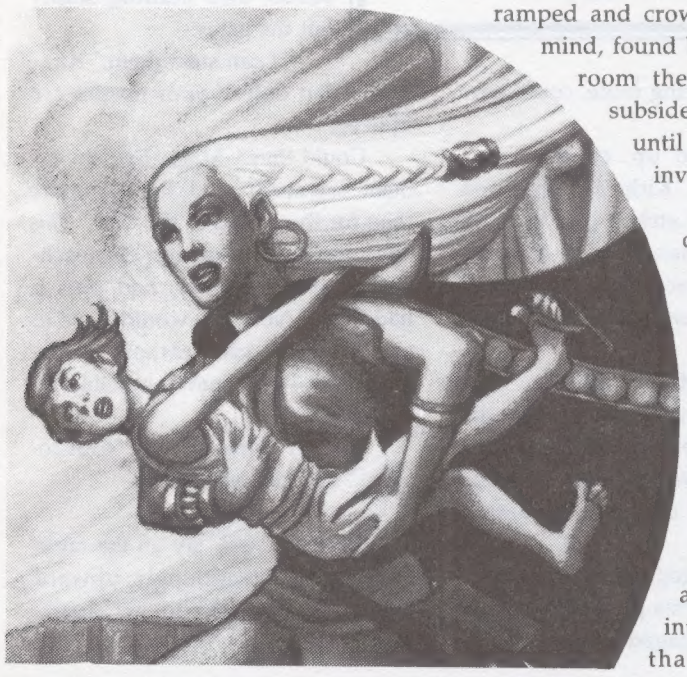
Mara set wards about the tiny room that served her as study and mediation chamber, cast dark silk over the Hand, then stood gazing at the scrolls that generation of priestesses had passed down to her. How long did she have to prepare?

She pulled down a dark, cracking leather scroll in which were drawn the paths of the karez, the underground water ways, and their hidden pitfalls. She had her cantrips: path-finding, all-heal, clear speech and magelight. She could probably add a spell for dowsing without overtaxing her strength.

But what spells-major would she take? Most magicians dared to memorize and carry two or three at the most, to be used one at a time. Anything else courted brain-fever or a fatal backlash. Which spells? She would have to take the spell of endurance and invoke it the instant that they escaped the City. True Sight: the spell that broke through all illusion. Related to the minor magic of clear speech, true sight would guard them against magical defenses.

Her spells crowded against the boundaries of her mind: a tight fit; and she might, hours from now, feel dizzy and sick unless she expended some of their power. But she could risk one more spell. She paused over the spell that turned enemies into allies, then passed it by. Of all the spells-major, that was one of the most deadly. Once it was released, the user never dared let it weaken lest she have enemies, not allies, at her back. Her eyes flicked over spells of strength, of summoning or banishment. Finally, she shut her eyes and drew her fingers over the scrolls. Cool, dry...the skins of parchment; the webs of the fabulously expensive papyrus brought from beyond the mountains... Her fingers seemed to cling to one particular scroll, she stopped and pulled it out.

The spell of desperation. For as long as she or her teacher or her teacher's teacher could remember—no one had recorded the use of the desperation spell. *Probably for good reason,* she thought. *But am I not desperate?* Triggering the mnemonic to ensure proper remembrance, Mara started to read, then to tremble as the magics ramped and crowded into her mind, found barely enough room there, and then subsided—almost—until they could be invoked.



She reeled once or twice before she caught the trick of walking with her brain crammed full of spellsmajor, then struggled into her bedchamber and changed into the clothes that she had brought from ta-Kithe's rooms. Her own robes were bright and fragile; and if she fled wearing a priestess' robes, she feared adding sacrilege to treason. She flung her cloak over the shabby, ill-assorted garments. Then she sat, waiting for him and Jess. Her eyes fell upon the Hounds and Jackals board—and upon the bony hand that still lay upon it. A fiery pulse tingled at the base of her skull and intensified into compulsion.

Mara forced her glance from the Hand to the window. The setting sun poured through the screen, turning the sinuous whorls of alabaster into a pattern of blood and bone. In minutes, Kithe and Jess would be here. She could not let them see the hand!

Picking up the Hand in a silken cloth, she tried to hide it in a chest that she carried into her study and locked wards upon. She even spared a ritual of banishment that cost her more strength that she should expend with spells-major to think of.

Still the light poured in, hideous, sanguine, and inexorable. She shuddered. There was no choice. Sighing, she retrieved the Hand and stowed it with the rest of her gear. When she looked back at her window, the sunset gleamed like a jewelled ritual chalice and held only peace. Over the usual smells of incense and the trees in the court below drifted a new scent: dry, wild, a little frightening—the spoor of the desert itself. She shivered, and the sensation vanished. Then she heard hasty footsteps before her door was flung open.

"Quick," gasped ta-Kithe. "I ran into a guard. No, he's not dead. I choked him. At least," he patted his waist with some satisfaction, "I got a sword out of it."

Access to the karez lay below. They hurried down flights of stairs, Jess clinging to Mara's neck. Lack-

ing the greater illusion spell, Mara could but blur their passage, not hide them outright. "Down this corridor," she breathed as they reached the cellars. She could smell precious moisture from the cistern and the narrow passage that connected it with the main tunnels. But ahead of them stood a watchman, his sword drawn. Did he guard against water thieves or against some attempt like this? ta-Kithe pulled a wicked little dagger from his boot-top.

Mara's temples began to throb, and she staggered. A spell was ready to work, but how? It meant madness or idiocy to tamper with spells; she had always been taught. One should always use them in precisely the way they were intended, she had been taught; but she had been taught many lies along with the truth.

If Kithe killed this watchman, the consequences might be enough to doom them before they could flee. But what could she do?

She knew the triggers for clear sight. What if she reversed them and used the spell, reversed, to blur vision and render them invisible to the guard whom she did not want to have killed? The scope and intensity of the spell-major pressed against her skull as she invoked it. Light dipped and swooped about her, as the spell canted and, still somewhat askew, took effect. Jess tugged her past the man, Kithe padding in their wake.

"Dead is safer," Kithe told her.

"No blood," she whispered, stumbling and sensing Kithe's dismay at having to be burdened with a madwoman and a mute, but with no thought—the gods smile on him—of abandoning him.

Kithe pushed Jess into the passage. Mara forced herself after them. She was going to collapse, she was going to scream, her head was going to burst like a warrior's when a slinger's bolt hits him—and then she could release the spell. As the world stopped thrashing, she all but sobbed in relief.

The karez was just tall enough to walk upright. in the center of the passage, only a rock's thickness of water flowed, and there was no torches.

"Dark," muttered Kithe. He was a creature of sun and sand, Mara thought with pity. Muttering words, she held up a hand from which a ball of light glowed, revealing Jess' delighted smile.

"Which way now?" asked Kithe.

Mara kindled faint handfire, took out her maps, and pointed.

...ahead of them stood a watchman, his sword was drawn. Did he guard against water thieves or against some attempt like this?

They trudged down the winding, cramped tunnels, their feet making scarcely a sound in the too-thin trickle of water that should have nourished the city. Once Jess started away from a section of the curved wall where bones protruded, the relic of someone who had died in a cave-in. Another time, Kithe muttered at a phosphorescence up ahead. Finally, Jess tugged on his robe for the third time, and he stopped.

"What's wrong?"

The mute boy shook his head in distress.

Mara compared the symbols marked on the walls with those on the map.

"We wandered in a circle," Mara said. "I was too tired, but Jess knew." She turned her concentration inward and drew strength up out of the parched ground, channelling it up through her spine and into her consciousness. Again, she activated the spell of clear-sight.

With the last of the strength that she had summoned, Mara caused the stableman to turn his head at the moment when she tumbled from the silence of the karez in to the smell and turmoil of stamping beasts, stableboys, and shouts for service. Kithe started toward the nearest stall, then glanced at her.

"Quickly!" she hissed. "It's wearing thin!"

Quickly, he saddled two of the ugly, cranky, incredibly tough beasts that merchants used to cross the Navel, then led them outside. At a growled command and a kick one sank onto its knees, and she mounted.

"Pass Jess up to me," she whispered. "And tie him to the saddle. I'm sor—"

"Don't even say it," Kithe interrupted. "Without you, I'd probably be dead by now. This is my part."

ta-Kithe led both beasts past the souk toward the gates. Mara stared for the last time at the carved towers and curving spires, at the thick walls of temples and serais, and the thicker walls of the City itself. Beyond lay the temple with its central fountain (now dry) of turquoise tiles and the vast avenues that ran from it. Beautiful, yes, but if it needed blood to survive, better that it crumble and disappear.

"They've doubled the guard," Kithe muttered.

"No one allowed out after sunset!" shouted the guard-captain.

"Since when, Captain?" asked Kithe, his hand going toward his belt-pouch. "You know that night

Bone Serai

travel is easiest. Now, come on..."

The man's eyes bulged. From outrage? Mara thought. Surely not. City guards were always being bribed.

"It isn't going to work, Kithe," she whispered.

"Be ready," he mouthed.

As the man waved two of his men in, their long spears raised to butt against Kithe's chest, he shouted and kneed his mount into action. It plunged and curvetted, striking with hoofs and teeth, then pushed through the half-shut gate, Mara's beast following. A man grabbed at its reins, and she kicked savagely at his hand.

As she struggled with the reins and with a saddle that felt as if it would twist and dump her onto the sands, the spell of clear sight that she had twisted to provide illusion faded and failed.

"It's the prince-hostage!" shouted the captain. "Call out the border patrol."

"*Hai!*" screamed Kithe, and lashed both animals. They gathered their long, awkward-seeming legs beneath them and set off, scattering the dark, gritty sand of the Navel with their long strides, plunging up the nearest dune, then sliding past its crest, down into a trough of shadow, where the beasts ran until they reached the next dune. And again and again and again. The wind of their passage deafened Mara to the sounds of pursuit that she strained to hear. The dark open sky seemed to yawn and engulf her. She reeled, lacking strength to invoke the spell of endurance. She fumbled a scarf from out her sleeve, bound herself to the saddle, then let herself slump against Jess who, mercifully, gave no alarms.

She was being shaken, falling from a height into bright light, heat, a pit of glowing coals. With a low cry, she thrust out her hands.

"Time to move on," Kithe mouthed. His lips were cracked and bloody. Behind him, half-covered by a fold of robe, Jess stirred.

Mara took a careful half-sip of water from the leathern bottle hanging from the saddle. She glanced at the sun, low in the west, where a veil of sand turned its crimsons to soft ochres and purples. She coughed, then spoke hoarsely. "Do you think that *they* rested during the day too?"

She was being shaken, falling from a height into bright light, heat, a pit of glowing coals. With a low cry, she thrust out her hands.

"They did if they wanted to keep their beasts alive, yes."

Their pursuers were experienced in tracking through the desert, as Mara knew that she was not, inured to the gritty black sand, the choking heat, the ferocious glare of noon. She gave Jess water, then sipped again. The waterbag seemed to shrink in upon itself.

"When we stop next, I will dowse for more." She touched the cantrip buried in the back of her mind, and it quivered slightly. Another cantrip jostled it and both trembled. For a terrible instant, all that knowledge of where and how to turn up precious moisture that they might filter through veils and sip or where they might dig flickered, threatened. She gasped, and the cantrip retained form: she retained knowledge. There would be more water.

Even the light of the setting sun clanged onto her head like hammer onto anvil. But at least now she was refreshed enough to cope with that. Shutting her eyes, she drew a deep, sobbing breath, and composed herself. Then she invoked her second spell.

Endurance.

When she rose and mounted, it was with a sure grace that drew a startled look from Kithe. "I'll get Jess mounted," she said.

The mute child lay with his ear to the sand. He started, then rose and pointed behind them.

"Are we pursued?" Kithe treated the boy as a man and a scout.

The child shook his head violently.

"Close?" Two more headshakes.

Kithe swept him up. "Let me take him, Mara; I'm a stronger rider."

Even the child had skills to contribute. Astonishing: she should be terrified of the desert that had stolen her first family and jeopardized...a this second family that she had created: instead, she felt joy.

All that sunset and into the night they rode. Buoyed by the spell of endurance and by the comfort of the night air on burned, chafed skin, she let herself slip into the light trance that Kithe told her experienced riders learned to relax them and prevent strains and saddle-galls.

For long, rhythmic hours of hoofbeats in sand, she dreamed of a home where people did not shed blood to coax water from the heavens. Then, a sudden thrust at her waist, and her riding beast's stumble jolted her back to wakefulness. She sawed on the reins and turned

the beast aside.

Mara glanced down and shuddered as she saw how close her mount had come to wedging—and breaking—his left fore-hoof in a crack in the flint outcropping half covered by sand. Only the twinge at her waist had warned her in time to rein in. She ran her hand over her belt and beltpouch. Inside the pouch lay the hand from the Bone Serai.

Kithe sniffed the air. "Storm coming," he called. "Perhaps an hour or so away, though it could be sooner, this far in. There's a lot of flint hereabout, so watch where you ride. I'll go on up ahead. I think I remember this land. We might find overhangs, maybe even a cave where we can shelter."

They paused long enough to muffle the animals' hooves—more protection for the beasts against flint and for themselves, lest the hooves strike sound from the rock, then rode on, looking for shelter. Despite the twisted ridges or rock, the loose stones, and the heat, Kithe pressed on through noon. He and Mara were riding side by side when Jess finally stirred.

"What is it, Jess?" Mara asked. The boy jerked his head, and what sounded like "uh, uh" struggled from his mouth. Though that was the closest approximation to sound that she had ever heard from him, she could spare no time to exult: his fear meant that the city's guards must be cutting down their lead.

"Can we hide?" she asked Kithe.

"I think..." He craned about in the saddle, then pointed. The low ridge toward which he guided them seemed impossibly far away and too tiny to shelter them, especially now, as the sky began to turn an ugly yellow ochre. Their beasts snorted and sidled, afraid of the storm.

As they pressed the beasts for haste, the rags fell from their feet, and hoofbeats rang out over the sand and rock. Mara twisted in the saddle. Surely, yes, that was a cloud of dust that she saw. The temptation to curse it stabbed through her. But a curse, coupled with the spell of endurance, would probably drain her.

"Father should have patrols out," Kithe muttered. He was scanning the rocks now for men of his own. Probably he had done so for hours, though Mara had not seen, had not known to see. She herself had hoped for a caravan, but merchants could not, would not protect them. Rescue could only come from an armed party. The Hand at her waist twitched.

Hooves clattered in gray-brown scree, then scrambled up the sloping ridge, following a twisting path as Kith sought for... "the cave!" he reined in triumph.

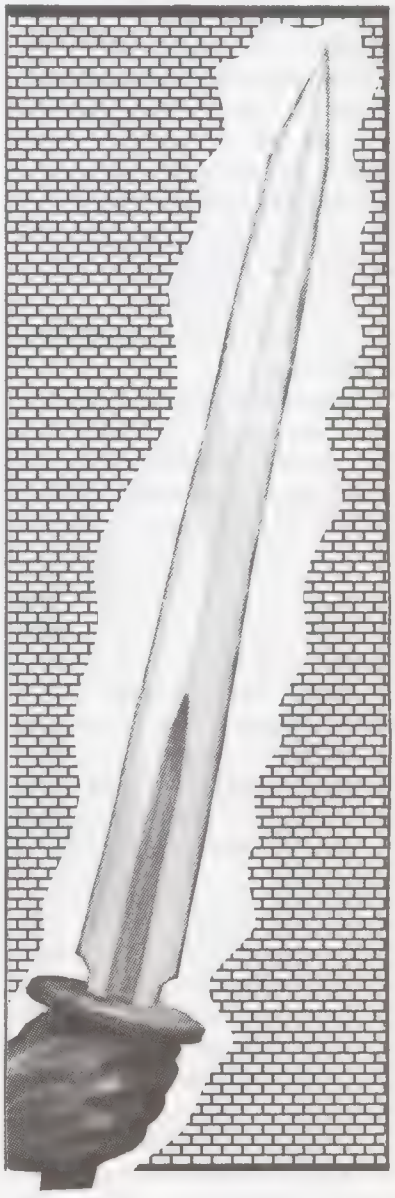
Mara bent her head against a whiplike blast of wind and sand. The animals panted and screamed, afraid of the storm that could etch flesh from bone. Up ahead, Kithe screamed something, then plunged toward her. But now, she could not see him. Jess jammed his fist into his mouth in terror.

The Hand came alive (or so it seemed) again. She brushed fingers against the pouch. She slid down from her mount, tore off her overcloak, and wrapped it over the animal's head. Though it trembled and danced in pain at the sand and gravel that stung its ankles, it followed her willingly enough into...a shadow, an overhand...thank all the gods, she had found Kithe's cave.

She led the beast within, and it sank to its knees with heavy moans beside Kithe's. "We have used this cave for centuries," Kithe said.

From the high lip of the cave, they could watch the guards ride across the flint. One man's mount stumbled and fell. A slash across the broken-legged beast's throat, and he climbed up behind another guardsman. From time to time, one or another of the outriders stopped and scanned the ground. Then all dismounted, muffled their beasts against the sand, and continued, haltingly.

A fluke calm in the wind showed Mara the terrain that they had crossed. The flint seemed to be oddly level, like ground smoothed, ready for a master builder and his



crew to come and put up a house. In fact, the entire area looked like a basin, girded by low walls and sheds...such as the cave in which they sheltered.

Below, the guards of Ani-Kalimat dismounted. She nudged Kithe.

Bone Serai

He nodded grimly. Jess tugged at Mara's hand and pointed.

A leopard-pelt lay across the breast of the leader. Soiled and sandy though it was, it was unmistakable. The Priest-King had hunted them out himself! She wanted to scream, to plunge into whatever darkness hid at the back of the cave; or she wanted to run forward and hurl herself at the Priest-King's feet for whatever punishment he could devise. Judging from Kithe's face, he felt the same fears.

"Can you lengthen the storm?" he whispered.

She thought of sand, of wind, of all that she had heard of the terrible black storms—of which this was but a faint shadow—in which twisting columns of sand scoured unlucky travelers. Her kin had died in just such a storm. Did she dare stir up another, stronger storm? Mara opened her consciousness.

Air...If dowsing found underground currents, might it also detect currents of moving air? Currents that could be speeded up or made stronger? Ahhhh...she found just such a current and breathed on it, breathed and pushed, and twisted like a travailing mother until wind and sand shrieked about her. The sky darkened once more, and the men below scattered across the weird flint plain, to whatever shelter they might find before the devil-storm's full force hit .

"That does it!" Kithe shouted, and leapt to his feet. He grabbed Mara up beside him and danced her around as Jess stared, and the beasts bellowed their protests. "Drink up the water! I'll find the supplies; you unpack the food."

Mara turned away quickly, as if to comply. They had not yet reached Kithe's city, but already he gave commands...she regretted the loss of those days and nights when they raced across the desert and had been partners.

What if Tar-Kalimat were just like the place she had fled? Kithe had snapped his orders just like the Priest-King. Was power all that Kithe had lacked?

Footsteps...Kithe returning. For the sake of the Kithe she thought she knew, they should discuss this. But there were too many footsteps.

She flattened herself against the rock and extended her undersenses to listen.

"Prince, we never thought to see you alive!" The accent was strange, but over the roar of the storm, muted by the cave's walls, she could make out words. "Your father will give us your weight in gold."

A leopard-pelt lay across the breast of the leader. Soiled and sandy though it was, it was unmistakable. The Priest-King had hunted them out himself.

"Thought they'd have poured my blood out on the sand by now, did you?" She heard Kithe's rich chuckle. "Thought I'd let them?" Some mutterings that could only be prayers to avert ill fortune followed.

"They almost did, but I had help. The priestess who was supposed to perform the sacrifice...refused."

Now why should a simple statement of fact, followed by laughter, make her face burn?

"No!" Kithe protested. "I honor her as a priestess and as a friend. As shall you." A rumble of assent and apology followed. "The city shall welcome her—and her fosterling, Jess, son of the Priest-King."

"Ani-Calagon's son?" The interrogative murmur turned feral and hungry as the footsteps neared the place where Mara and Jess hid.

"Jess? Why do you ask?" Kithe's voice was tense, and Mara tensed too. "He's a mute."

"You don't care?" Kithe almost shouted in horror. "No! Mara brought us from Ani-Kalimat to escape..."

The Hand at Mara's waist clenched, and she felt it drive the breath out of her.

"Come on, Jess, we're not staying here," she muttered and grabbed up the waterskin and the reins of the nearest animal. Better the storm and the desert than either city, if both depended upon blood to survive. But Kithe...the betrayal.

"Mara, they'll sacrifice Jess. Get him away!"

She tugged the child up into the saddle and pulled on the reins with all her strength. The beast bellowed and tossed its head, but obeyed her. Jess clung to her hand as they picked their way by touch past the entry-way, onto the ridge itself, and downslope.

In her preoccupation and fear, Mara had let the storm subside, but even the remnants that roared and ramped outside the cave were more violence than Mara had seen during her life...except for the cities that had no place for her but priestess, and no place for Jess at all. Better that they both should perish, quickly and cleanly in the sand.

She heard more footsteps, then recoiled as she saw the glint of gold—the sort of clasp used on a leopard skin—ahead of her hunted the Priest-King!

Mara dropped Jess' hand. "Stay safe here for just a moment," she whispered, and gave him a push to make certain that he would. She half-ran, half-slid down from the ridge and onto the flint basin. The wind was dying now. She had done well to flee as far as she had, but "well" was not enough.

"Jess..." That was the Priest-King's voice.

"Jess...I know you're somewhere about here. Come to your father, son."

The boy idolized his father—or had. Mara had seen that wordless love and deep hurt every time that Ani-Calagon turned away from him or sent him from the room.

"Come on, boy. I've come to take you home...ah, now I've got you!"

She could imagine the trusting, clever child, approaching his father, thinking that now, finally, everything might be all right, only to be snatched up by his father.

And then to Mara's astonishment, she heard a shrill, terrified scream. It was Jess!

"ta-Kithe! Are you out there? I have Jess here," said the Priest-King. "I think you heard him. That means—as you know—that he can be my heir, a prince of his city. And it means that he is eligible for the sacrifice. I swear, if you do not surrender to me, I will..."

Mara felt tears mix with the grime on her face and coat it with a mask of black grit.

"I'm coming!" Kithe called.

"Don't!" Mara shrieked. "Don't do anything!"

"Shoot me that outland bitch!" snapped the Priest-King. So it was "daughter" no more, was it? Well enough.

Once again, Jess screamed. And in some deep recess of Mara's mind, she remembered. The spell of desperation.

She heard a whine. The Priest-King's bowman was too fine a shot. Next time, he would not miss. She must work quickly.

Ripping protective veils from nose and mouth, not caring whether or not Ani-Calagon could hear her, she flung her arms wide open and cried out the words of the spell of desperation.

Jess screamed for a third time. She heard a grunt of pain, choked off, then a curse as Jess bit his way loose and ran toward her. And abruptly, she was thinking his thoughts, feeling his fears, and suffering, as he had for most of the short years of his life, his memories.

...dry land...no rain at all...and a hand found in the desert...there was a younger son, too, and a mother, and a summer as dry as this one...the glint of a knife, and Jess' scream...and rain thereafter. Best not think of where they went. Best not to speak. I promised not to tell, and I haven't. But that was my father...

So this was why no one ever wrote of what the spell of desperation produced... A sharp gasp of breath and a catch of pain told her...

She no longer wondered why Jess was mute. Instead, she marveled that he remained sane.

"Go back!" she shouted, then doubled over as the Hand twisted with such force that her beltpouch opened. When she had breath to stand again, she looked up and gasped. Then she started toward the Priest-King and saw Kithe fling himself at the man's feet.

Now she understood why the flint in this desert basin looked as if it had been smoothed to resemble foundations. On it, wakened by her spell of desperation, rose the gleaming white dwellings of the Bone Serai.

So *this* was why no one ever wrote of what the spell of desperation produced. The Serai flickered, vanished, then reappeared. A sharp gasp of breath and a catch of pain told her that Kithe had hurled the Priest-King to the ground. Behind him, footsteps hastened...*his men, not his enemy's.*

"Quick!" he told her. "Take Jess and run!"

Jess' father would sacrifice Kithe or, lacking him, and now that Jess showed himself able to speak, he might sacrifice his own son. But Kithe's people might sacrifice too, as the heir to their ancient enemy. Truly there was no place for the child, and no place for her either. They were desperate, and desperate, she seized up Jess and ran toward the gates of the Serai, carved of the bones of some huge, unknown creature, and into its depth.

Behind her rose cries of amazement, horror, and a terrible, cheated hunger. Down the streets of the Serai she raced. Bones instead of trees lined them. Patterns of tiny bones adorned the walls in just the way that a city of the living might have mosaics. The very streets seemed to be paved with... no, she could not bear to think of what it was that her feet trod! Ahead lay an enormous building with wide, bleached doors that opened as she neared.

She raced within and glanced about. She had entered a temple of some sort. There before her was an altar, made of stone—thank the Goddess—its horns beautifully carved. On it lay a hand, the very one that Mara had carried for so long, and which had warned her of

Bone Serai

danger. It was no longer an object of horror. Now it looked like something a master craftsman might have carved from the finest ivory, tinting its nails with the hues of life to produce a work of art. "Jess!" she whispered, "run to the altar."

Sanctuary had always been inviolate; *this* sanctuary should be guarded by terror as well as by holiness. Jess clasped the altar's horns, and Mara took the carved hand in her own, then laid her cheek on the altar in entreaty.

The Priest-King stumbled in, his eyes wide, almost maddened, chased by ta-Kithe.

"This is *your* doing!" each accused the other.

The Priest-King drew his blade. Behind them came their men, all desperately afraid to venture within the Bone Serai's sanctum, yet even more afraid to abandon their masters.

"Whore!" the city-lord called Mara, and he spat at her.

"You'll die for that!" shouted Kithe.

"Why deny *us* the boy...poor enough thing that he is." That was an officer in a strange uniform—a man of Tar-Kalimat, he must be.

"He is mute, he cannot rule or stand as a sacrifice," said Kithe.

"I heard him scream!" argued the officer. The man started toward the altar, and Kithe blocked him. The Priest-King smiled, well-pleased to see prince and warrior quarrel.

In an instant, they would all draw their words, and blood would fall, profaning this altar too. Was that the answer? Let them slay one another? And then what? The hand warmed against her own, and its fingers tapped her wrist, almost as if in reproof. That was not the answer, then. But what was? "I did what I did to avoid bloodshed," she whispered. "Help me!"

Jess looked up. What he saw made him laugh in delight, and his laughter stopped the men where they stood. Before the altar now stood robed figures. They were smiling and, Mara saw, they were tall, their skin soft, and their yes pale: soft-weather people much like herself.

They lifted Jess in their arms. "You, little one; there seems to be no place for you in the world. Have you come to stay with us?"

> ***As she knelt, the priests in the Serai began to chant. The words of the chant rang throughout the temple, resonating in the bone columns and arches, behind her eyes, throughout her body.***

"Yes," said the child. "Oh yes." He held out his hands to Mara, beckoning her to follow.

She started toward the robed figures, and the Priest-King followed. A sphere of shimmering fire formed around the altar. The Priest-King screamed, but could not stop himself before he ran into it. By the time that the fire subsided, his bones lay very white and clean on the floor.

"And you, daughter. We remember you. We sent you and your family forth in hope the way that a desert plant withers and sends out seeds, waiting for the rain that may come tomorrow, years from hence—or never. You were our hope for change. Mara, look at you, and what you have done! You earned a place in one city and might have occupied the same place in the other. But now you have denied both, and you can expect only..."

"Not in Tar-Kalimat!" shouted Kithe, who kept a safe distance. "Mara, I swear to you..."

"That is not a criticism," the priest went on, despite ta-Kithe's passionate interruption.

She looked at Kithe. Prince he might be, but he was still a youth, likely to be overruled "for his own good", as they said. She had had enough of trusting princes, even princes who were friends. But to trust wholly to magic? Well, she had trusted magic, and her wits—and the Hand—for this entire mad flight, and they had not failed her. She stared up at Jess, who beckoned from a robed woman's arms.

"Priestess, will you join us?"

"Join you? I don't even know what you are."

"We? The cities call us the Bone Serai, and so we seem, for we can accept among us only those with no homes and no futures. For now. A time will come, however, when we shall come forth from our citadel, and this whole area that, in bitter jest, you call the Navel, shall become as once it was: a garden for us to tend and to cherish."

"As once we did," came other voices. "But when the water ran dry, we faced a choice. Withdraw for a time, until once again water ran beneath the earth, or take the path that you cities took—as other cities have chosen so long ago that even their ruins have been forgotten. We withdrew. The Cities call us the Bone Serai. If you wish, you may call us home."

Kithe knelt. Apparently, the encounter with his own men had

shaken him to the soul. He had fled a city where he was victim, only to find that his home destined him to use victims; and the discovery was all but unbearable. He laid his face against the bone floor of the shrine. "I beg you," he said huskily, "let me join you."

"Prince ta-Kithe," one man said with a respectful bow. "We would indeed welcome you...had you not a place of your own to go to. A place, I may add, that needs you and in which we too need you. It may be that through you, Tar-Kalimat can break the cycle of blood. Will you try?"

Kithe looked up at Mara and Jess. "I shall miss you." But when he looked over at the bones of his enemy, his eyes lit grimly. The Priest-King was dead. In the unrest that would follow, a resourceful leader might come in from outside...

"I will think of you," Mara told him. "How shall he explain this to his father?" she asked.

"If you want to help him, daughter," the voice addressed Mara, "you may."

She nodded.

"Then kneel."

As she knelt, the priests in the Serai began to chant. The words of the chant rang throughout the temple, resonating in the bone columns and arches, behind her eyes, throughout her body. She heard herself singing, heard yet another voice, and knew it for Jess'. Now the words sounded like the dowsing spell. Water...they could sing about rain. But the dwellers in the Bone Serai were disembodied; their voices, though fair, had no blood in them. It took blood to call for continued life. That must have been how the tradition of blood pouring out on the earth to bring rain began. But, in the way of warriors, the Cities had forgotten the songs and remembered only and always the blood. Mara threw back her head, and the chant took on a deeper richness, and irresistible entreaty, a welcome—

And the temple of the Bone Serai quivered to thunder. Rain started to fall.

"Now," said a priest, "these two have claimed and received sanctuary. The rest of you, return to your homes. There will be rain. But do not forget."

Muttering, clutching amulets, some half-maddened from terror, the men of the cities left the temple. Kithe remained until the last.

. He bowed to the alter and then smiled at Mara, holding out his hand.

"I promise," he said. "When I am king, we will no longer have a sacrifice. And we will return to help you reclaim this land. And I shall also reclaim..."

"Go now...please," she whispered.

he strode from the building and from the serai itself, and she heard his footsteps die away on the flint.

"Gone," said the robed ones. "Now we can return to our own place."

The serai twisted, flickered through lights and winds that Mara perceived dimly as space and time. She shut her eyes for very awe. When she opened them again, she saw that she stood in a temple that was no longer stark white, but glittering with mosaics. A fountain played in its center.

Mara released the altar horns and walked outside. On all sides, tree-lined avenues radiated from a great central square, filled with trees and with people who cheered as she and Jess emerged, two new castaways who had found a home.

Except for the trees and the pools, the Serai looked much like the temple square at Ani-Kalimat. Ani-Kalimat as it should have been. As it might yet be.

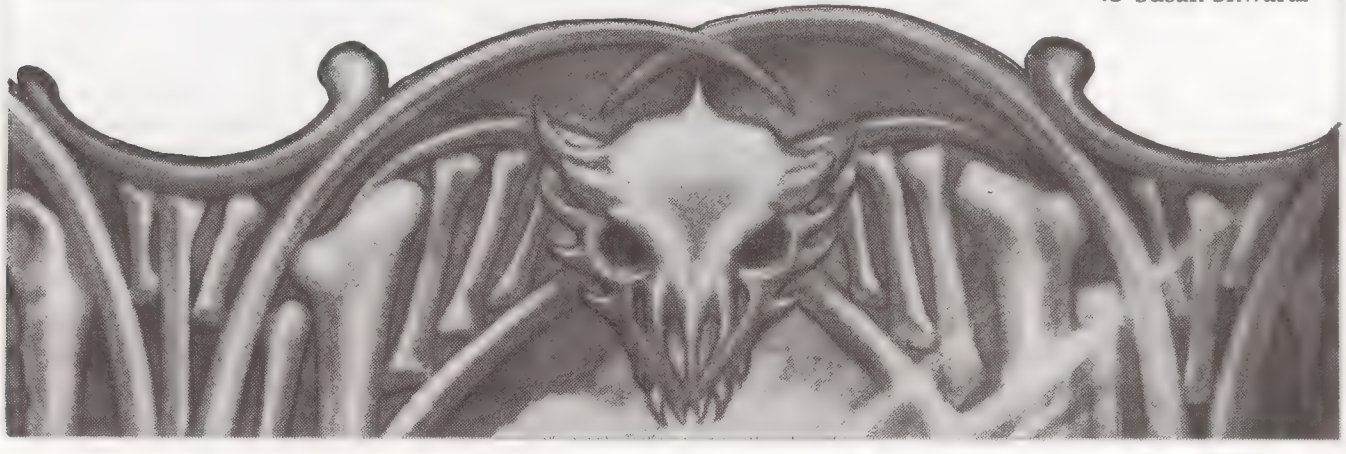
All her life in Ani-Kalimat, she had been told that she had been saved so she might serve the City. What if he had been right, after all?

Now, she knew. Raising her arms again, she cried out in triumph and joy. The thunder pealed once more. A light rain began to fall. If Mara shut her eyes, she could imagine it falling on the cities she had fled, filling tunnels and cisterns, softening hearts and customs too long baked by sun and drought into mercilessness.

This was the work she had been born for. This she had worked for, she, Jess, Kithe, and even in his angry, doomed way, the Priest-King.

The long exile had been necessary. But now she was home.

❧ Susan Shwartz



PARADOX

by Dorothy

Don't take on so about the universe (*she said, winding her shuttle with rapid flicks of her fingers*). The universe is tougher than you seem to think. What might look to you like the flimsiest of chances are made of up causal chains as vital as spider's silk, at least as strong as this web of mind. (*She ran a thin fingertip across her warp, and it sang softly like a harp tuned all to one key*). It bends, or bellies out in the wind, but it won't break. And there are no paradoxes.

(*She set the shuttle to the web, throwing it swiftly from hand to hand, while the thunder grumbled high overhead.*) Some, like the Spanish barber, are no more than a trick of the language; others, like the man who murdered his grandfather, put themselves out of existence. The best you'll ever see is some poor little contradiction that looks as if it might grow into a paradox: but it always dies a-borning.

You might have thought there was the making of a paradox the day Peter Bannister fell through the time hole. He fell from the twentieth century A.D. to the fourth century B.C., and landed with a hell of a thump.

For the first few minutes he was occupied with getting the breath back into his lungs and the dust out of his mouth; he didn't have the energy to look around. It was daylight, he could tell that much, and the air was cold against his skin. And it was quiet; there was no sound to be heard but his own coughing.

Presently the dust settled, and he got up and brushed himself off. He was standing in the middle of a dirt road, and the light and the cold air had the clarity of dawn. On either side of the road were close-clipped meadows, thin grass and a few yellow wildflowers. The soil was thin, and its rocky bones poked through.

He could tell he had come a long way. That long, timeless fall, longer than it would take to fall a hundred stories—and then he had only landed not quite hard enough to jar his back teeth loose. Something very strange was going on. Like the highjacker's or mugger's victim, he was suddenly exceedingly cool, his brain working at top speed, casting around for any possible advantage. Halfway to the horizon there was a clump of trees, and a thread of smoke rising out of it. The road led in that direction, and he followed it.

The farmhouse, when he found it, was made of clay bricks and roofed with red tile, Spanish fashion. A flock of dispirited-looking chick-

LOST

J. Heydt

ens scratched in the yard. The front door stood ajar, and early-morning sounds and cooking smells drifted out through it.

A woman came round the corner, carrying a bundle of twigs. "Excuse me," said Peter. "Could you tell me—"

But the woman dropped her bundle and squawked at the sight of him, ran to the door and slammed it behind her.

Peter followed her to the door and knocked on it. A moment's bustle inside, and a small brown-haired scowling man opened the door. "Houdoss," he said, or something of the sort. "De telace?"

(Damn, Peter thought.) "Does anyone here speak English?"

"De face?"

"American," Peter said. "Coca-Cola, Miami Vice, Luke Skywalker. MacDonald's?"

A woman's voice spoke from inside the house. "Barbaros dis," the man answered her, as he closed the door.

Peter leaned against the wall, his knees suddenly weak. "Barbaros" was one word he recognized; the ancient Greeks had used it for anyone who didn't speak Greek. And that meant...

But he was still thinking with the unnatural cool-headedness that is the reverse of panic. He knocked on the door once more. When the man opened it, just a crack large enough to see through, Peter held up the bundle of twigs the woman had dropped, and smiled.

By mid-morning, using their wits and a lot of hand-waving, Peter and Polos the householder had worked out an agreement. Peter fetched and carried, hauled sheaves of grain to the tiny barn. A subsistence farmer can always use an extra pair of hands, especially at harvest time. He slept in the stable, and at mealtimes, the children of Polos's household taught him Greek.

By the end of the week, he could make himself understood, after a fashion. By the end of the month, he was reasonably fluent, though it took him a long time to get rid of the lisping American accent that aspirated all the wrong consonants. By the end of two months, Polos and his wife Irene were wondering how they'd ever managed without him.

Peter spent part of the time dredging up old memories of high-school chemistry sessions. At the end of the slaughtering-season, he rendered down some scraps of fat and invented soap. His first batch was too harsh to use on skin, but it

Paradox Lost

was good enough for the laundry. Irene let him make a second batch. By spring he had perfected a mild olive-oil soap, scented with rosemary. He and Polos sold it in the Athenian market, four hours away by donkey, and Polos let him keep part of the profits.

It might have seemed an unfavorable time to start a new business. Hellas consisted of dozens of little city-states, each at war with one or more of its neighbors by turns. Athens and Sparta had been slugging it out since before anyone in Polos's household could remember, sixty years perhaps; Athens had briefly been conquered by Sparta, no more than twenty years ago. Only a few years back, the Persians, long expert at playing both ends against the middle, had broken with Athens and made alliance with Sparta, an agreement that had returned all of Asia Minor to Persian rule and given Sparta the lion's share of Greece.

It was hard for Peter to get an idea of when he was. He had not studied Greek history except as part of a poorly-remembered survey course, and the Athenians did not mark their dates in years B.C. Sokrates was already dead when he arrived; Plato was teaching in the Akademia and writing the dialogues that he said he had heard in the house of Sokrates. Peter had the vague idea that Aristotle would be next after Plato, and that Aristotle had been the teacher of Alexander the Great, but nobody here had heard of either one.

By his third year in Hellas, Peter was an accepted member of the community—as much as any metic could be. Athenian citizenship was by birth only. He and Polos went into partnership with Demodoros the fuller, and sold bleaches and dyes as well as soaps. They all became reasonably prosperous, and Polos took a house in Athens and sent his eldest son to the Akademia.

(*There was another thunderclap, and the first fat drops of rain began to fall. The curtains bellied out in a puff of wind, cold and clean-smelling.*) At some time during the next few years, Demodoros must have let the word spread about Peter's account books, that he kept in such outlandish notation and with such accuracy. In his fifth year, Peter opened a small school of his own, in a room of Polos's house, and taught basic arithmetic with Arabic notation (but not Arabic yet, it was still Indian). And he prospered, while all around him alliances were made and broken, Leagues constructed and destroyed, while Athens fought Sparta and Sparta fought Athens, and the other city-states turned again and again the coats they had cut to fit their cloth.

> ***"The web was taking shape now upon the warp, a closewoven dark green stuff as slick as an eel's back."***

In the year Athens broke the Spartan blockade at Korkyra, Peter asked to marry the daughter of Demodoros. Demodoros refused him indignantly; it was unlawful for a citizen's daughter of pure Hellene blood to ally herself with a metic. Instead, Peter married the quick-witted daughter of his half-Sicilian landlord, and never ceased to praise his luck.

In the year of the peace between Athens and Sparta (that is to say, as soon as anyone could hope to look for it, and all the old wives were counting on their fingers behind their own doors), Peter's wife bore him a son, and they called him Nikephoras.

(*The web was taking shape now upon the warp, a close-woven dark green stuff as slick as an eel's back. The candles fluttered in the wind, and the shadows slithered across the cloth like living things.*)

Nikephoras was eleven in the year Philip the Second came to the throne of Makedon. Here at least was a name Peter recognized, and he began to teach Nikephoras a great deal that he didn't share with others. But he sent him also to school at the Akademia, and after Plato's death, he went to Aristotle, to learn as much as he could, and teach a thing or two.

Philip's son Alexander was sixteen, and men were beginning to hear of him, in the year Peter died. He was seventy-five, a happier man and older than he could reasonably have expected to be if he had stayed in New York. (*The rain was falling heavily now, and she paused in her weaving to close the shutters and latch them.*) Nikephoras gave him a noble funeral and the city turned out to mourn him, even though neither he nor his children were citizens. A few years after that, Philip conquered Greece, and the question of pure Hellene blood and

hereditary Athenian citizenship became a lot less important.

A few years after that Philip died, and Alexander succeeded him. Alexander admired the Hellenic arts and philosophy, and made it his business to spread them wherever he went. He took as his teacher old Aristotle, the student of Plato; and when he set out on his conquests, since the old man could not travel so far, Alexander took as his tutor and advisor Aristotle's best pupil, a vigorous man of forty named Nikephoras.

Alexander died of a fever in Babylon. Dying, he left the governance of his empire to Nikephoras, and though his generals grumbled, some of them aloud, it seemed the sensible choice. Nikephoras married Roxana, the mother of Alexander's heir, and took them both under his protection; but the boy disappeared before reaching manhood and no one seems to know what became of him.

Alexander's empire fell apart presently anyway, of course (*she said, leaning on the ratchet of the cloth-beam to draw the warp tight*). It was, as we say, not steam-engine time. But it held on longer than might otherwise have been expected, and when it came time for the Roman Empire they were hard put to it to defeat what was left of Greater Greece. General Pyrrhus came within thirty miles of Rome itself before a cavalry charge cut him down.

On the other hand, the Eastern mystery cults crept westward along the trade routes much faster than before. When Jesus was born in the Province of Judaea, practically everybody was waiting for him. When a mob of Zealots stoned him to death, the whole Empire went into shock; and when, the following week—well, you can imagine what effect *that* had.

And the world went on. Peter, asleep in his mother's arms, knew nothing of this of course. But the world went on, and when the twentieth century rolled around the city on the island in the river's mouth was New Caerleon, not New York. And there was no Peter Bannister, not even anyone remotely like him, to fall down the time hole and land in the fourth century B.C. No Peter; no Nikephoras;no Empire; no changes.

"The candles fluttered in the wind, and the shadows slithered across the cloth like living things."

The web of time rippled and shook, like a sail in a gale. *(My dear! Listen to it coming down!)* No changes, no New Caerleon, and Peter Bannister fell down the time hole again. But this time—here's the important part—this time, he remembered the last time.

There he sat, all breathless and dusty in the middle of the road, and he said to himself, "Didn't I just leave this party?" But this time, of course, he knew what to do. He went up to Polos's door and introduced himself in his best Greek as a refugee from Mantinea (which had been destroyed that same year): the sort of story dear Odysseus used to tell so well

If he had prospered in his first lifetime, it was nothing to what he did now. He knew the outcomes of the battles before they were fought; he knew the scandals before they were hatched and the conspiracies before they were conceived. He acquired something of a name as a sorcerer, and if it hadn't been for that, I think the Athenians really might have offered him citizenship. But he didn't care, having his eye on other things now, and he took care to marry the innkeeper's daughter on the same day and bed her in the same hour, to be sure of begetting Nikephoras again.

He began his son's education early, which may have been just as well. Because in the boy's thirteenth year, Peter was killed by a footpad sent, so it was said, by one of his competitors. It didn't make much difference in the long run: Nikephoras knew already what was expected of him. And so the world went on, and the changes came and went, and presently Peter fell down the time hole for the third time.

Now at last it occurred to him, as he sat there spitting out the dust, that perhaps he just might possibly have had some kind of effect on history, and that history might have been bouncing back and catching him under the chin. Take it easy, he told himself. Humility, that's the ticket. I don't want to set the world on fire. Better to be day-laborer to a landless man (*as poor Achilles put it*) than king over all the dead.

He went to Polos's house and introduced himself as a poor tenant farmer who had fled from the ruin of Mantinea. Polos let him sleep in the stable, and he stayed there for nearly twenty years. He never invented soap or arithmetic; he let Athenian business alone. he never

Paradox Lost

married, but he fathered a daughter on one of the servant girls. When he died at forty-six, tired out and worked to death, nobody noticed much.

But his daughter Laodike went to Piraeus and became the concubine of a Macedonian captain, and her daughter Philia became the mistress of Ptolemy I. Ptolemy had four wives all told, and concubines not a few, but presently found that Philia had brains. She gave him the sagest advice for many years, and managed to tire of him before he tired of her. She managed to get out of the palace with the jewelry Ptolemy had given her, changed her name, and bought a wineshop in Mareotis. She lived happily there to the end of her days, bearing six children to a person or persons unknown, children with a streak of ingenuity and common sense exceptional even in Alexandria. And the world changed, and changed back, and Peter fell down the time hole yet again.

This time he sat in the road's dust for a long time, mulling over his lives and how they had been spent. And he thought of another lifetime in Polos's house, and of speaking even less of what he knew, and of sleeping alone in the stable till he died old in middle age. He thought of going somewhere else, out of the mainstream of history, to some obscure people whose only fate would be to fall under the swords of empire. He thought of having children whose future was a blank, and he thought of having no children at all. And he thought of coming back, again and again, to sit in the dust of Attica with it all to do over again. Finally, he got up and walked away from Polos's house, down the road to the sea. He found a cliff where the surf ate caverns into the rock, and he threw himself into the waves.

The fish ate him, and so poor Peter made some contribution to the well-being of the Athenian people after all, for the fishers brought the fish to the market at Piraeus and sold them. But they were the same fish they would have been if they'd eaten somebody else—or as near as makes no difference. And the world went on, and that was the end of this story.

So don't trouble yourself, my child, for the welfare of the universe. She knows well how to take care of herself, without you or me lifting a hand to interfere. (*And she cut the cloth from the loom, and gave it to me to wear home against the rain.*)

❧*Dorothy J. Heydt*

Dreamtime in Adjaphon

by

John Gregory Betancourt

Dreamtime came quickly in the last days of Adjaphon, for then we did not know the end approached, and we were drunk from our power and our success. Abroad, our armies marched again, this year in war against the Heron King to the far East, and priests of our god-patron Tokos-Dien, predicted nothing but success.

If the days seemed golden, perhaps they truly were. The wealth from a dozen newly conquered lands flowed through Adjaphon's gates, and the thousand eyes of Tokos-Dien painted on the rooftop of every building looked down and seemed to bless us all.

I was the son of a cobbler. Jad, my mother called me, but my father called me Jadred, which was a man's name, for I was thirteen that summer and could have joined the Emperor's army had I chosen, like so many of my childhood friends had already chosen. In battle there is glory, they had said, and they had gone to win that glory, along with a share of the Heron King's treasure.

But I did not go, for I was thin and slight, and most took me for a boy of eight,

though I was indeed thirteen, and a man. I knew my weakness: in battle I would have been slain by the first enemy soldier I faced, just as I had been beaten up by every boy my own age I'd ever fought. Perhaps I was a coward, but I do not think so. I was being realistic. My death could not possibly have served the Emperor's purposes.

Once I had prayed to Tokos'-Dien for a man's body, strong and tall, promising to serve in his army if he would help me, but I received no answer. Perhaps it was just as well. I was not meant to be a soldier.

The beginning thing, in the dreamtime, was the dream. It came to me one night. In the dream I had wings like a bird, but was not a bird myself. I soared over a ravaged land, with crops long-trampled into the ground by feet and hooves, with farmhouses tumbled to ruins, with mills and barns and outbuildings razed to the ground. People were running everywhere, panicked, shouting and screaming, but I could not hear their voices. Then I looked up and saw fires burning across the whole of the horizon, even on empty ground where there was nothing to burn, and running before the flames came the greatest troops of our Emperor, throwing down their weapons, casting off their armor. The men's faces blurred in the heat, rippling like paper-hanging on a windy day, but I thought I glimpsed my best friend, Savil, who had gone to join the fight against the Heron King three months before.

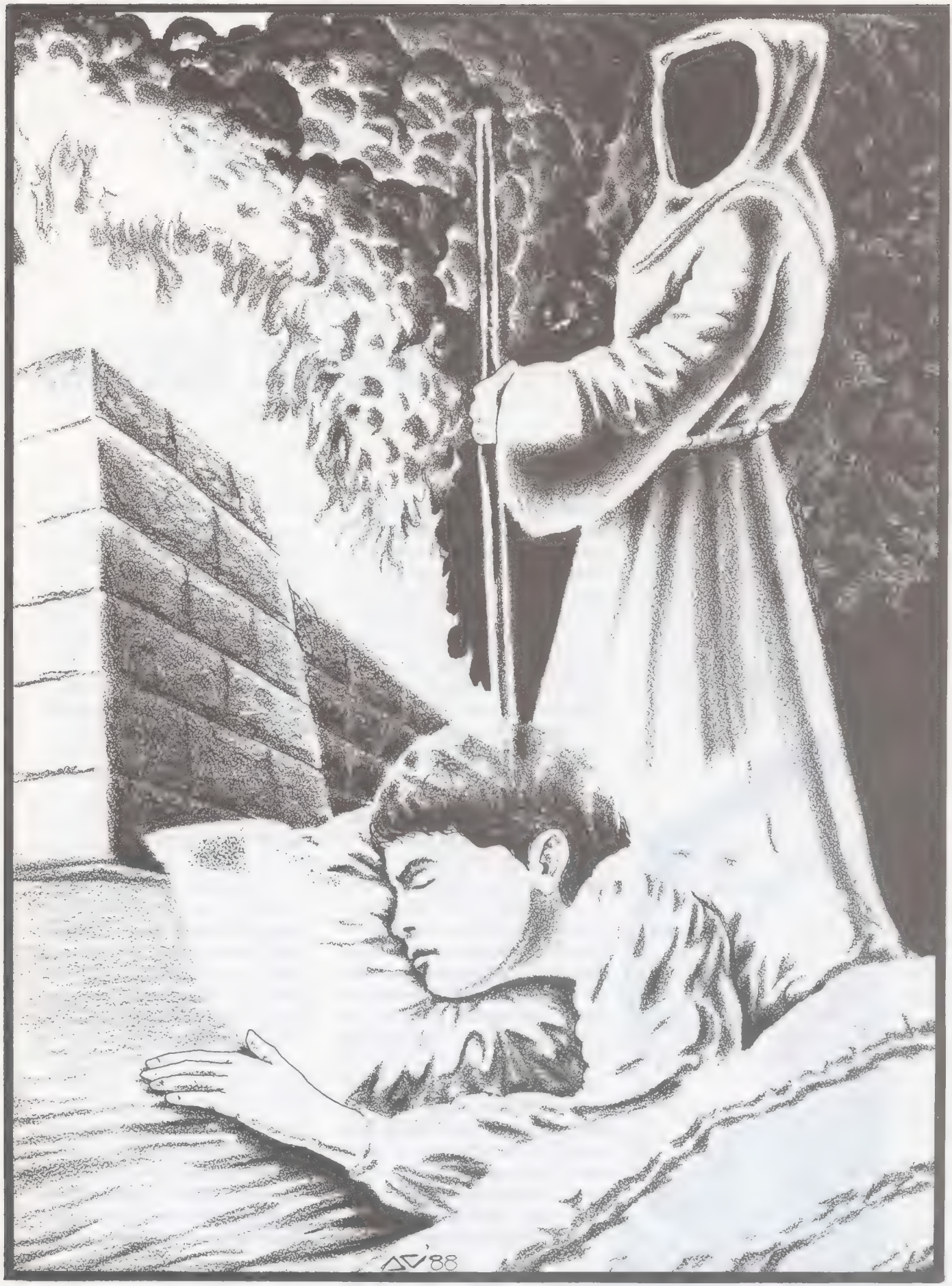
"Savil!" I called, but he did not pause. Then the flames were upon him, burning, searing, and I could not bear to see more.

I woke, gasping, the bitterness of the smoke still in my lungs. My brother Aghen stirred beside me, but did not wake. I forced myself to silence.

Bright images of those dream-fires still lingered in my eyesight, as though I had been there, as though I had actually seen Savil die. I shuddered at the thought, then denied it. It had only been a nightmare, I told myself, and made signs of aversion to keep away evil.

After that I could not rest, could not lie still. I rose and went to the window in only my nightgown, threw open the wooden shutters, and gazed down into the street.

In those days it was said Adjaphon never slept: merchant caravans moved through the city's gates like an endless serpent, bringing all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manner of fabulous animals and weavings and trinkets and slaves to the marketplace at every hour of the day and night. But at this moment, oddly, there was only a single man in a hooded cloak standing there. He leaned on his staff and seemed to peer up at me, and where his face should've been, I saw only blackness.

"Jadred," I thought I heard him say, "you are called."

Quickly I shuttered the window and barred it. Had the man truly spoken, or was it another part of my dream? He seemed to have been *waiting* for me. I could not rid myself of that thought. And the moon was bright enough; why hadn't I seen his face?

I stood there beside the window for a long time, feeling the cold of the floor beneath my feet, feeling my heart beating in my throat.

That was the start of the end, in the dreamtime of Adjaphon, though I did not know it yet.

My father's shop consisted of three rooms. The largest of these was the workroom, where flat sheets of leather lay bundled up against the two largest walls and the sweet, musty smell of tanning-cream was so thick you could almost see it. Here my younger brothers and sisters and I cut leather strips and thongs from patterns every morning. In the afternoon my mother and father sewed them into sandals and boots—mostly boots these days, boots for the Emperor's army, since the purchasing agents always came first to my father's shop.

The second room was for storage, mostly of leather but also for finished goods not yet on display. It was small and dark.

The third room opened out onto the street. Finished boots and sandals of every design and size imaginable filled it. They hung in strings from the rafters, from pegs in the walls, from intricately carved wooden racks in the center of the room. Here my mother and father sat during the morning hours, speaking with those who came in to buy or to gossip, laughing and joking, or just watching the parade of passers-by in their few idle moments.

Early that afternoon, I heard many feet enter the shop at once, and my father's welcoming call cut short.

"Where is Jadred, your son?" a loud voice cried. "Tokos-Dien has called him."

My mother screamed. I stood, shoving back my chair, looking at my two brothers, at my four sisters. None of them said a word; none of them moved. They stared at me, their eyes wide with shock.

Abruptly the curtain to the workroom swept aside. A middle-aged man in the gold robes of a priest of Tokos-Dien ducked through the doorway. He was tall and his features had a proud, chiselled look to them, almost as though he were made of stone. Behind him moved a tide of underpriests in blue robes, and all manner of other servants of the god-patron.

Only the priest's eyes moved as he surveyed the room. When his gaze fell on me, he knelt. "It is you," he said. "You are the dreaming one." He said it with such awe and reverence that I did not know how to begin to reply. And yet as he said it, I also knew what he meant: my dream the night before *had* been more than a dream. It had been a vision sent by Tokos-Dien for purposes only the god-patron or the god-patron's priests could ever fathom.

"Please," I said. I licked my lips. I didn't want to leave, didn't want to abandon my parents or the safety of their home. "Please," I said again. "What do you want of me?"

"I want nothing," the priest said. "It is Tokos-Dien who calls you."

He rose, and at his gesture, the underpriests came in around him, as though a floodgate had been let loose. They ushered my brothers and sisters from the room and blocked the way so my parents could not come in. Then their servants stripped my clothes away and I stood there naked and shivering while they chanted over me.

"You are called," the priest kept telling me. "You are called."

I tried to run as an underpriest began to shave my head, and his knife opened a shallow gash beside my ear so that blood ran quickly. The priest grabbed me and hugged me to him, talking like a farmer soothing a frightened beast. His robes were smothering, full of odd spicy smells. I struggled, but his grip was too strong, and his voice had begun to lull me. In moments everything receded to a blur of sight and sound. Distantly I felt myself being shaved all over, then dressed in gold robes like the priest's. Finally I felt myself being carried out into the street.

I am called.

My parents were huddled in the corner of the display room, my brothers and sisters clutched tight. They dared not protest, I knew.

I am called.

The underpriests trundled me into a golden carriage. The priest climbed in beside me, still whispering his soothing, mind-numbing words. Someone clicked to the horses and we were off in a mad rush down the street. The servants were running ahead, clearing the way for us, and I felt a cold, sick fear at the thought of what was to come.

How could Tokos-Dien have called *me*? Surely I was unworthy. I didn't want to go. I longed for release, wished I were dead, wished I had never been born. The god-patron seemed to have singled me out for particular punishment of persecution. In that moment I learned what it was to hate—to hate the god-patron's priests, and to hate

Dreamtime in Adjaphon

Tokos-Dien himself. Mostly I hated Tokos-Dien; young as I was, I knew the priests were only servants doing their master's will.

Once, long before, I had prayed to Tokos-Dien for help, for a man's body, when I was a child and everyone my age had beaten me. He had not answered then. Why had he sent a vision to me *now*?

My first days in the Temple of Tokos-Dien were the most painful of my life. I refused to speak of my vision; rather, I denied it, said I had seen nothing, heard nothing, done nothing. They should let me go, I said. They should let me return to my mother and my father and my life as a cobbler's son.

To their credit, they did not believe me. Finally, on the eighth day, they locked me in a small room, and priest after priest came in to question me, to prod and probe my mind. They did not let me sleep or rest or eat or drink.

On the second day I croaked my confession: "Yes!" I cried. "I saw a vision!" And, after I had drunk and eaten, I babbled of all that I had seen.

The priests transcribed my every word and went away to study what I had said. They left me by myself, in a locked room, with a soft bed and as much food and drink as I could possibly want. I should have been happy, I know, but instead I cursed Tokos-Dien. I did not expect a reply, and there came none.

That night I dreamt a second time, and in this dream I was floating down a river on my back. It was dark here, but somehow I could see. A mountain loomed ahead, and the river ended in a vast whirlpool. I knew without a doubt that I would enter the whirlpool and be sucked down into the underworld, where Tokos-Dien rules. Somehow the god-patron was bringing me to him.

There were hundreds—*thousands*—of soldiers' corpses floating down the river around me. Turning my head, I noticed Savil bobbing to my left. I almost failed to recognize him. His skin was white as a slug's belly, his body bloated by the corrosion of death to nearly twice its normal size. But there was a smile on his face, and though he was dead, he seemed happy. Tokos-Dien had called him, too, but in a different way.

Standing alongside the river were men with staffs. These, I knew, were the servants of the god-patron. They used their staffs to keep the corpses from coming to rest against the river's banks.

One of them reached out and hooked my shoulder, pulling me over to him. I found I could move, suddenly, and stood. The water ran from my shaved head and priestly robes in rivulets. I walked from the river.

The man—if man he was—had no face. There was only blackness inside the folds of his hood. He leaned on his staff and said, "You are called, Jadred. Will you serve the god-patron?"

"Why does he want *me*?" I whispered.

"He is a god. His reasons are beyond your comprehension, or any mortal's. It is merely enough that he wants you."

"Why does he not just take me?"

"You must go of your own free will. Enter the river and it will bear you to him."

"I don't want to go."

"Do you realize what you are saying? The anger of a god is a fearsome thing. Do you wish to anger him?"

"I want to go home," I said. "I want Savil alive. I want everything back the way it was!"

"So be it," he said, with a cold finality...and, I thought, with a touch of a sorrow.

I awoke in my bed, beside my brother Aghen, in our little room over our father's shop. I was dressed in my nightgown, and when I touched my head, I felt my hair once more, thick and long. But there was also a scar beside my ear: the place where the underpriest had cut me.

It was early, but the street was eerily silent. I felt too much joy at being home, at being safe, to worry about anything, though.

Finally I heard a crier approaching, shouting the news as he came.

"Defeat at Solcena!" he cried. "Two thousand dead! The Heron King is marching on Foltrene!"

I sat up, startled, bewildered. Foltrene was scarcely a day's journey away. How could the Heron-King have reached it so quickly? How had the Adjaphon's great armies ever been defeated?

A shiver went though me. Roughly, I shook my brother awake. "Aghen! Tell me the news! How did the Heron King defeat our army?"

He stirred and mumbled, but finally he sat up. "Idiot," he mumbled, rubbing his eyes. "Lemme alone."

I demanded the history of the way, and when he finally saw I wouldn't let him sleep until I knew, he told me. Told me how the Heron King had gathered thirty thousand men in a time of peace and attacked our furthest borders. Told me how the Heron King's soldiers had swept into Adjaphon's outlying cities like an unstoppable tidal wave. Told me how the Heron King's god-patron, Tokos-Dien, promised nothing but victory while the priests in our temples, the temples of Condja-Dien, the god of the fields and harvest, predicted nothing but death.

And as he spoke I remembered

all these things; but I also remembered another time, another place, when Tokos-Dien had blessed Adjaphon and nothing could hold back our Emperor's armies.

I tried not to sleep that night for fear of dreams, but when I finally dozed off, I saw only blackness. Tokos-Dien had truly abandoned me.

The next morning the news was worse. Foltrene had fallen in a matter of hours. My mother wept and my father tried to comfort her, could not. My younger brothers and sisters huddled in their beds. Only I moved through the house almost untouched by the news. It had such an air of unreality about it that I hadn't yet grasped all it meant.

Outside, panic ruled Adjaphon's streets, as a last few people fought their way to the one open gate. There was a rumor of safety to the South; they would follow that rumor, though they would most likely be overtaken by the Heron King's army along the way. There was surely no safety in Adjaphon, they said, or anywhere nearby.

I wandered the streets myself for a time, easing my way through little knots of arguing people. It was strange to see rooftops of bare tile and slate, without the thousand eyes of Tokos-Dien painted on them. Everywhere I went the shops and houses were closed and shuttered. It would not be long, everyone said, before the Heron King's forces attacked. His scouts had already been sighted.

I came upon Savil. He was hobbling on crutches toward the southern gate, a pack on his shoulder, a look of weary hopelessness on his face. When I saw him, I abruptly remembered the horse trampling him three years before. He had not been able to join the army, even though he'd wanted to. But at the same time I also remembered the proud day he'd enlisted, though it seemed more like a dream. He had come back and showed me his uniform, his sword, his shield with the thousand eyes of Tokos-Dien painted on it.

The anger of a god is a fearsome thing.

I embraced him, said, "I'm sorry," and ran away before he could reply.

I found myself near the temple of Tokos-Dien. I ran up the wide steps and into the huge altar chamber, where prayers were held and sacrifices made. Only everything was different now; it had become a temple to Condja-Dien, I saw. Plants grew in wild abundance; it was more like a garden than a building, but that only made sense, for Condja-Dien was god-patron of harvests and growing things.

I heard a scuffle and a scream from one of the side rooms, then a grim looking captain from the Emperor's private guard came out, followed by a handful of his men. Their swords were bloody. I stared, shocked, bewildered.

"It was the Emperor's orders," the captain said at last, in a strangled voice, as if that excused him. "The priests foretold the Emperor's death this morning."

"Oh," I said. Then: "I came to pray."

"Go ahead, for all the good it will do." He headed for the door, followed by his men, and they marched down the steps to the street, armor jingling.

I realized then that I *had* come to pray—to Tokos-Dien. I'd never meant for all this to happen, never meant for Adjaphon to fall or the Emperor to die or Savil to be crippled. I thought of my mother weeping and my brothers and sisters huddled in their beds, waiting for the Heron King's soldiers to break down the doors to our home.

The anger of a god is a fearsome thing.

I shuddered. It seemed mad that Tokos-Dien had done all this because I had refused his calling. I

hated him for that pettiness, but I feared him more now and did not dare to speak my hatred. Had I been offered the choice again, I would have gone, and willingly, into the whirlpool to answer my calling and serve him.

This temple, though, had one of the highest towers in the city. I climbed it, carefully avoiding the bodies of the priests on the steps. From the top of the tower I could see clearly over Adjaphon's walls.

On the horizon an army was assembling, columns of troops lining up, the leaders on their horses, others holding aloft the proud banners of Tokos-Dien—I could just make them out—so they fluttered overhead. The mass of soldiers stretched right and left for what seemed like miles. I did not doubt that the Heron King had thirty thousand men or more at his command.

Dreamtime in Adjaphon

"Stop it," I whispered, "stop it and I'll serve you."

There was no answer. Somehow, I had expected none.

Throughout the day I stood there and watched the Heron King's forces gather. The smoke from their campfires darkened the sky. That night, the lights in their camp seemed to wink like a million stars fallen to land.

Then I wept and I prayed and I pleaded with the Tokos-Dien, the god-patron I knew, to spare Adjaphon. And when he did not answer I no longer cursed him. I grew silent and thought about all that had happened. If the Emperor had known I was the cause of Adjaphon's downfall, he would have killed me rather than the priests. It was almost a funny thought. I did not laugh.

With dawn came the attack. As swarms of men with ladders rushed the walls, as battering-rams attacked all six gates, balls of fire came hurtling into the city from the Heron King's catapults. Soon flames were leaping everywhere throughout the city.

I could not bear to watch. I turned away, buried my head in my hands, and tried to shut out the sounds of fighting.

Ages passed. The buildings burned and I could hear the crackle of flames and smell the acrid smoke. Bands of the Heron King's soldiers roved the streets, looting, raping, destroying everything of beauty. Finally the temple itself was on fire. I felt the heat and looked up.

There was a man in a hooded cloak standing before me, leaning on his staff. I could not see his face.

"What do you want of me?" I cried. "What more is there?"

He shook his head. "Adjaphon's time had come. If you had answered your calling and served Tokos-Dien, it would not have mattered. The god-patron would have found another to deny him, and this city would still be dying, only you would not remember the past or the glory Adjaphon once had."

I made no answer; there could be no answer. I was just a tool, a pawn in Tokos-Dien's game. I realized that now. It made me ache inside with a hurt that no amount of time could ever heal.

The god-patron's servant said, "He calls you now. Will you go with him?"

Slowly, I nodded. Perhaps that would help end the suffering. Perhaps it would spare my parents and my brothers and sisters and my friends some little measure of pain. *Perhaps*. But I did not think so. Tokos-Dien is not merciful.

I am floating down a dark river, and around me are the bodies of the Emperor's soldiers newly-dead in the battle. The Heron King has won, and perhaps for a time his city will flourish. But Tokos-Dien is quick to bore, and soon he will favor another, and then the Heron King's lands will fall to a different conqueror and the cycle will start again.

I weep not for proud Adjaphon, which died a sorrowful death; I weep for Tokos-Dien. Or perhaps I weep for those who now serve him. A god-patron without mercy is a terrible curse.

Perhaps I shall say that to him myself. I have nothing left to lose. When the whirlpool drags me under, I shall be reborn. Adjaphon will never die so long as I remember her. Perhaps this is not an end, but a beginning. Perhaps the dreamtime will end and all will be reborn.

I doubt it. But we shall see. We shall see.

John Gregory Betancourt

Hitchhiker

by Jayge Carr

It had been raining for a long, long time. The traveler's boots splashed through the puddles, throwing up water to join the streams meandering down the soaked overcoat. Rain-darkened hair clung to neck and collar in dispirited rat-tails.

Jamie Pritchard came roaring around the curve far too fast, foot grinding the accelerator viciously. If he missed midnight curfew, Dad would ground him for*ever*. His lights glittered off the trees, reflecting for a second on the weary plodding figure and sweeping past.

"Odd." His brows drew together in a frown. Not much in this direction, just a few farms, including the Henderson place, where he'd just dropped off May Ann. He growled. Why couldn't Dad give him some extra time, knowing how far out May Ann's folks lived from—

Anywhere. Almost without his ordering it, his foot jammed down on the brake. If he didn't pick him up, that guy wold walk the night through to reach anywhere. For a heart-stopping second the car skidded crazily, the trees whirled around him, and he realized what a fool he'd been to brake so hard on such a wet road.

Then everything steadied, he had the car under control, and he slid to a stop and backed to the steadily trudging figure. Perhaps it was that air of obdurate tenacity that had made him come back. Anyway, he wouldn't leave Jack the Ripper out in a night like this, so far from anywhere.

"Hey, fellow—" Jamie opened the door to shout into the rain. "Rotten night, isn't it. Can I give you a lift somewhere?"

"I thank you, young sir," the stranger replied in a soft, husky voice. "But I fear I needs must take you out of your way."

Jamie chuckled and used the current favorite teen-age cuss word. Under the draggled wet rat-tails, brows that might have been perfect arches raised. "Look, pal," Jamie continued, "ain't no place else to go but town, and that's where I'm headed. Hop in."

"I hesitate to differ with you, young sir, but my destination is not your town." Huddled as he was against the force of the rain pounding down, and softly polite as were his words, there was still an air of hauteur, of pride about him.

"You're lost, bud," Jamie said, "If you think there's any place else to go on this road."

"It's not that I scorn the comfort of your conveyance on my journey," the traveler said, still so soft spoken as to be barely understandable above the drumbeat of the rain. "Nor would I willingly contradict you. Nonetheless, my destination is not on your road, and I hesitate to take you far from your own path."

"Aw, get in already," Jamie growled. "At least I can carry you to where you want to get off the road again. For Pete's sake, shake a leg." He frowned, as a reason for the other's hesitation struck him. "I'm not asking you for money, jeez. I'm offering you a ride, that's all, no obligation. You didn't ask; I offered."

"So you did, young sir, so you did." Somehow, while Jamie blinked, the traveler had come around the car and was sliding into the passenger side. His scent came with him, itching at Jamie's nostrils, wetness and oddnesses the boy couldn't identify. "I thank you. Even with your kindness, I shall be behindtime, but not so behind as if I had only my own resources to draw on."

Jamie shook his head, but closed the door and started up again. A real nutcake, but he seemed harmless enough. His mind flashed memories of parental warnings, but he threw them off with a shrug. It this nightbird had robbery or worse in mind, he wouldn't have hesitated so long in getting in. Besides, Jamie wasn't right tackle for the Wildcats because of the cheek dimple that still sometimes appeared to plague him. "Been travelin' long," he asked casually, gunning the car with a roar to rival the thunder.

"A veritable eternity, young sir. Yet even the longest journey must eventually come to but a step away from its close."

"Yeah." Jamie flicked a glance at his watch, night-glowing on his left wrist, and ground a scrap of lip between his teeth. He was never going to make it, and Dad was going to give him a double rocket—in spades. "A long journey, eh," he

Hitchhiker

made polite conversation with an effort. "On foot, too. Rotten weather for it. Or, hey, did your car break down? That why you're on foot?"

"I cannot drive," the traveler said softly. "I cannot drive, it is not—it does make things a trifle, ah—incommodious. I admit, weather like this is not what I myself would have chosen."

"Me, neither," Jamie said with a chuckle. "Me, I like a warm summer beach, hot sun, plenty of chicks, and the surf up." He flicked another glance at his watch.

"I, too, prefer heat," his companion admitted. "Though I have, in my time, endured colder than this."

"Yeah." Jamie lit himself a cigarette, the glow of the car lighter reflecting oddly crimson in the other's eyes. But at least the smoke covered that odd smell which made *frissons* dance along his spine like tiny spider warnings. "It's cold now, but the real winter's not here yet. Dunno which is worse, freezing rain, like this could turn into, or honest snow. My older brother skidded on a powdering of snow last winter, had a bad concussion and broke his arm."

The other shuddered. "Snow," he said in his soft tones, "is quite a punishment, when you're not—accustomed to it."

"Snowmen and skiing and white Christmases make up for the worst of it though." Jamie grinned, remembering. "And sledding and snowball fights and the way a fresh snowfall glitters in the sun."

"Yes, even the direst of fates has its compensations."

"Being on foot in the snow classifies as fairly dire, huh. You have far to go yet?" He looked at his watch again.

"I had, yes, but—you appear most anxious, young sir. If any efforts of mine can help..." The soft voice died away.

Jamie snorted. "Not unless you can turn back time. I'm gonna be late, and jeez, am I gonna catch it."

"Catch it—ah, I comprehend. You, also, have a rendezvous you fear to miss. But surely, there will be another opportunity—"

Jamie took a few seconds to untangle the other's meaning. "You meeting someone tonight? You gonna be late and miss him?"

"I shall not make tonight's rendezvous, no. But be not distressed on my account. There is always another opportunity."

Jamie glanced at his watch again, and shrugged. "Well, no sense both of us being late and in trouble. If I take you all the way in the car, will you be on time?"

"I—might." For a second the traveler turned the back of his sleek wet head to Jamie, looking out the rain-streamed window at...what? "But you, yourself—"

"Will be late no matter what. So—why not fix you up OK."

"I am responsible for this. Another small tally to my account."

"No." Jamie grinned at his own reflection in the window. "I did it. May Ann's just too tempting a morsel, I guess." Too tempting, his thoughts went on. It was what both sets of parents wanted, though. Finish school, and marry May Ann, and work in Dad's store until—

"Ah, yes. The woman tempted me."

"Anyway, like I said, less'n you can turn back time, I'm in a big sticky. Might as well take some more time, drop you wherever it is you want to go. Me, I wouldn't put the devil himself out to walk in a night like this."

"Would you not, young sir. Then I think I shall take advantage of your generosity. If you will allow me to guide you—"

"On the roads only," Jamie warned. "Ground around here can be a swamp when it's wet, much less soaked like tonight, and this ain't no four wheeler drive. You better believe, this is no night to be stuck out in, especially this far from a phone and help."

"Fear not, young sir. I shall not abuse—be ready to turn right when I give the command."

"But there ain't no—"

"Turn!" Something imperative in that single word made Jamie turn the wheel, though he could see little

"...Me, I wouldn't put the devil himself out to walk in a night like this."

"Would you not, young sir. Then I think I shall take advantage of your generosity..."

through the driving rain, even the trees that usually lined the road were lost. The car bumped slightly and then went smoothly on.

"I don't remember a road here!"

"Keep going straight. The surface will—suffice."

"Yeah, but I don't— Hell, if it was even a gravel road, we'd be bogged down already. But there ain't no paved roads crossing until—"

"Would you question the gifts of the —powers that be, young sir. The road takes us where we would go, and bears your vehicle smoothly, does it not?"

"Yeah, but—"

"Perhaps you simply had no reason to notice it, previously. I assure you, this path has ever existed here."

"I guess so." Whatever it was, it was as smooth as a greased slide. The car skimmed along, not a jolt or a bump, no pot holes, no clutch of mud or crunch of gravel, no *thump thump thump* where the segments of concrete didn't quite meet.

"You can go a little faster, it is quite safe," the traveler said.

"OK, hang onto your hat."

"I am not wearing a—"

"Your head, then. Hey!" He pushed down on the gas, and the car seemed to fly. "Fast enough to suit you," he said with a happy laugh.

"Immeasurably, young sir."

"Been waiting a long time for this, eh."

"A very long time, young sir. Since long before you were born."

"And tonight's the night, eh?" He was Andretti winning the 500, all he had to do was jam his foot down a little harder—

"Yes, tonight the waiting will be ended, the long span completed. But—" Somehow his smile was crimson in the darkness, perhaps his teeth reflected the glow of the cigarette. "But you, young sir, love your home, for you the good far outweighs the bad, you would never consider it—exile."

"Sure." Jamie grinned back around the comforting circle of his cigarette. "Not that I wouldn't like to go sample the big city for a while, y'know, have a chance to do my own thing."

"I understand that need, only too well. What prevents you?"

A shrug. "The usual. Family, money, what-have-you."

"I would not let others circumscribe you from doing what you need and desire. I've always said, act as you consider *you* must, and pay the price after. No matter what the ultimate cost, at least you will be doing penance for what you have done, not what you've omitted to do."

"Never thought of it quite like that." He put out his cigarette impatiently; it had tasted subtly wrong, almost like a burnt-out match smells.

"One always has responsibilities to one's—to those close to one. But in the final judgment, one must answer to oneself, to be the most one can be. If you fail *that* responsibility—"

"But—when the two responsibilities conflict—"

"That, my young friend, is something each must decide for themself. And pay the inevitable penalty for that decision."

"You mean—either way?"

"Of course. That is the one immutable universal law. All must pay."

"Sounds like you're saying, people must pay just for being alive."

"Of course."

"But—I didn't *choose* to be born."

A knowing smile. "Did I say it was fair? After all, young sir, did the universe decide to accept the responsibility of you, feed you, clothe you, nurture you? It is a two way road, my companion on this night."

"You—do you do only what you want?"

"Always."

"And pay the price after?"

"Inevitably."

"But—"

"Here! Stop here!"

"Here?" But, obedient to the note of command, his foot slammed on the brake, and the car came to a smooth stop.

"But—but, there's nothing here." The rain seemed to isolate them even from the scattering of trees he knew had to be there.

"Only prices, and buts, young

...There was a sound,
all sweet power,
like time snapping
or air clapping into a
vacuum or perhaps a
heavenly choir
welcoming—

Hitchhiker

sir, which are universal."

"But—but—"

"Here. Here I must be, and would be, and will be. Here." He opened his door, and a flash of lightning illuminated his face, inhumanly beautiful and beautifully inhuman, with eyes that were windows to the universe, fiery stars spinning in their depths.

Jamie blinked and flinched, and he was facing an ordinary man, half in, half out of the car, with features so totally commonplace that he knew he would forget them the second the man disappeared out of his life.

"I'll wait. In case your friends don't make it in time for you."

"That's overgood of you, young sir." For the first time, the traveler touched him, a slight tap of hand against his jacketed shoulder; and Jamie was lapped in an emotion so potent that he afterwards couldn't have said whether it was joy or terror, only that, for a tiny Infinity, he was Beyond all he'd ever known. "But not the slightest bit necessary, I assure you." Then the traveler was withdrawing, and he was only young Jamie Pritchard again, shivering slightly as the wind blew cold rain into his face.

The car's lights were a bright spear through the grey anonymity of the rain, outlining the tall figure (was it somehow growing taller instead of shorter?) stalking through the grey nothingness toward—

A flash of lightning illuminated something. Jamie blinked and squinted. trying to pierce the blur and see—

There was a sound, all sweet power, like time snapping or air clapping into a vacuum or perhaps a heavenly choir welcoming—

Jamie blinked, and the shaft of light from his headlights was empty.

Puzzled, he got out, and walked around, but there was no sign of the traveler who had shared his car for a short time. If his feet had left tracks, either the rain had washed them out already or Jamie couldn't distinguish them, even with the help of the flashlight from the glove compartment.

At last, oddly drained yet somehow also wildly exhilarated, on top of his own particular and beloved world, he turned the car around on the road he couldn't see, and headed for home, thoughts tumbling through his mind.

For starters, why should he have to help out in the store during the summer? Any moron could haul and heave and load and unload and run errands. If Dad really needed another pair of hands, if it wasn't make-work to teach him the business—as if he already didn't know, summers and spare time all his life—let him hire somebody. Jamie could get a job in the city, gas pump jockey, supermarket bag boy, whatever—and see how the other folk lived. Who knew, maybe he'd like his taste but decide to come back home. Maybe he'd decide to stay. maybe he'd figure a way to enjoy both worlds. But let *him* decide.

For now—he made the turn back onto the highway almost automatically, and sped for the warm welcome of home.

For *now*, there was going to be a rocket to the moon, and a probable grounding after.

Even as he drove, memories of the last part of the night were fading from his mind, like a watercolor set out in the rain, the rain mixing and blending and finally washing all the colors away. He had picked up a hitchhiker, hadn't he, an older man he'd gone a little out of his way to drop off.

Not important, anyway. May Ann now—

He pulled up the familiar driveway, reliving his date with May Ann for the *n*th time. The porch lights were on and welcoming, the garage door up—he flicked a glance at his watch. Just how late was he—

It was exactly midnight, and he'd made it back on time after all.

Just another Saturday night, and the dark shadow that was his father loomed in the doorway to welcome him in out of the rain.

❧*Jayge Carr*

The Lady, The Wizard, & The Thing

LYNNE ARMSTRONG-JONES

I lifted my skirts as I began up the stairway. I stepped carefully, as there were cracks and uneven places.

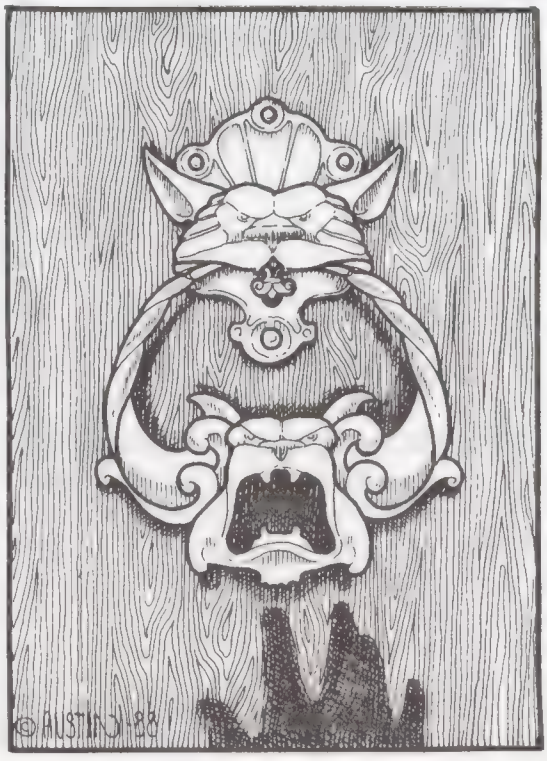
It was a clear and cool autumn day; bright and sunny. The gentle breeze stirred my clothing.

I walked to the large, thick doors. In the middle, near the top of the one on the left was a heavy-looking iron knocker. In the same place on the other door was a peep-hole. Its little cover was closed.

The knocker felt stiff in my hand, as though it had not been used for a long time. I hesitated. There was something strange about this place. I looked yet again over my shoulder.

The grounds surrounding the castle were not very well-kept. The hedges had not been recently trimmed. If the place had been abandoned, it would certainly not help my situation.

I looked down once again and noted how the stairs had begun to crumble. Then I studied the knocker once more. It felt as though it had not been oiled in a very long time.



Where was I? Whose property was this? Most importantly, was there anyone here at all?

Well, I thought to myself. *There is only one way to find an answer to that question.* I prepared to use the knocker.

And stopped before it could strike the surface.

Why was I hesitating? I found myself looking once more over my shoulder. I felt as though I was being watched.

Then I shook my head, scolding myself. *You are all alone, Ventura. You have neither seen nor heard anything but birds since your horse bolted and left you stranded.*

So why do I feel such unease?

I had been walking for what seemed a very long time and I was tired. I dearly wanted a chance for a bit of rest.

But I also had to get a message dispatched to my brother, the Earl of Frewen. My caravan had been attacked, and to my knowledge, I was the sole survivor.

Yes, I decided, I must do everything I can to send word to Dason. It would be vitally important that he be warned of the advancing army, and I may well be the only one to reach him.

With renewed determination, I brought the knocker down hard against the solid door. Thrice, I knocked, amazed at how much effort was required because of the extreme stiffness of the device.

I could hear the sound booming and I was certain that my efforts

would have been heard.

But I waited. No one had come to answer my knock.

Someone must be here, I said to myself. *That is my only hope.*

Sighing, I decided to circle the castle and continue my search, desperately hoping that someone might still reside there.

My efforts were frustrated, however. All that I could see was solid wall. High up in some of the walls were windows, but nothing of the inside was visible.

As I passed the final wall and was about to turn the corner and return to the front door, I heard a sound. I stopped and listened, but did not hear it again.

I looked upward and saw a window high above me. Had I seen a movement up there? No, I decided; it was just my imagination once again.

Several thoughts now entered my mind. I could try knocking again. I could also imply return to the forest and continue on foot in the direction of Dason's earldom.

That thought did not hold appeal. I was a noblewoman, not a soldier. I did not even have any weapons, save the dagger that the captain of my escort had slipped to me. This he had managed when he'd slapped the horse on the rear to send it, with me, hopefully to safety.

So I returned yet again to the heavy doors. I lifted the knocker once more and began to bring it down.

As I did so, the door opened.

The horrendous creak was louder than any sound I might have made with the knocker!

There was a sudden rush of warm air as the opening became wider. It smelled stale.

It was very dark inside. I pushed the big door so that it was open as wide as it would possibly go. This gave more sunlight, to lessen the uneasy feeling the dark had given me.

Once I had had a good look inside, however, I almost regretted having opened the door. For it was very dusty and dirty. The corners seemed filled with webs. I had to cough in order to clear the powdery dirt from my nose and throat.

I shook my head. It was a rare occasion when a noblewoman such as myself came across premises as unclean as these! I lifted my skirts, unable to bear the thought of their dragging across such a filthy floor.

The light was comforting, but that feeling of being watched from behind was still with me. I took a last breath of clean air and stepped inside, anxious to find someone who might help me.

Still I hesitated, uncertain whether or not I should leave the doors open behind me. The light was comforting, but that feeling of being watched from behind was still with me. I took a last breath of clean air and stepped inside, anxious to find someone who might help me.

My walk along the dusty corridor was a slow one. The place had an eerie, unworldly feel about it. Part of me was disgusted that I would even acknowledge such an impression. *How ridiculous!* I sounded like one of the kitchen-women, with their empty, mindless chatter.

But the other part of my mind was remembering all those stories of wizardry and enchantments. I had heard tales of people who could tell when magic was in the air.

I had no such abilities.

Onward I went, deeper into the castle. It began to seem strange that I had not yet come to anything resembling a room. There appeared to be nothing more than a long corridor.

Then I noticed the staircases ahead of me. There was one which wound its way up, and another heading downward. I approached cautiously, all the while chiding myself for my apprehensions.

The staircase leading upward wound around and around. I thought that I could see a bit of light somewhere at the top of the parapet. I assumed that this came from one of the high windows which I had seen from the outside of the dwelling.

But the downward-leading steps seemed to lead to light as well.

It was the descending staircase which I followed, perhaps curious as to the source of the illumination. Again, I had to tread carefully, as the stonework was beginning to fall apart in places. I kept one hand on the wall, while my other attempted to keep my skirts from the awful dust.

But, in spite of my efforts, I slipped. Fortunately, I did not have too far to fall. I slid down the crumbling staircase in a rather unbecoming manner for a lady of high birth—bouncing from step to step on my broadest part, if you know what I mean.

I landed in a rather bruised and sore heap, at the bottom of the stairs.

However, I did not have much opportunity to pity myself. For out of the corner of my eye, I had de-

tected some movement.

Something—or someone—was down here with me. But I had heard not a sound.

Then, suddenly, I heard a scratching noise, ahead and around the corner. Hastily, I regained my feet and prepared to pursue who-ever it was. But then I stopped, uncertain. After a thought, I pulled the dagger from my belt and clenched it in my fist. Then I continued.

It was generally dark, but the illumination seemed to come from a very small window, or perhaps it was simply a hole or large crack in the wall. Whatever it was, I was grateful for it.

I could not see very clearly in the dusty darkness. I could certainly not see anything which might have made that noise.

But as I came closer to the crack in the wall, I saw it.

It was some sort of creature, rather hideous to behold: quite unattractive. At first, I was not even certain whether it was dead or alive. But then I remembered the scratching sounds.

I moved closer to it. It was a reptilian thing. About the size of a hound, I'd say. It appeared to be covered with scales, which glistened with slime or something in the faint light from the crack in the wall.

It seemed to be looking at me.

This was a bit too much, even for a strong lady of noble birth such

The Lady...

as myself. I allowed myself one shudder of repulsion before I hurried back in the direction of the staircase, dagger still in hand.

Yet something had compelled me to stop, even before I had placed one of my fashionable shoes on the step.

The thing had spoken. Yes, spoken.

"I beg your pardon?" I said, turning to face the creature.

The thing had not moved from its place by the wall. It addressed me from there. "My lady, please forgive me if I have offended you with my appearance. Such matters are beyond my control."

It licked its lips with a forked tongue, and continued, "Please help me, fine lady. I am greatly in need of help!"

Indeed, I thought to myself. But I said aloud, "Now, how could I help you? What are you, anyway?"

"Alas," it replied mournfully, "I am a victim, a helpless victim! But you can help me from my imprisonment, fine lady. Please give me your help."

Imprisonment? "I see no cage surrounding you!"

"Ah, my lady," it sighed miserably, "the shackles binding me are not ones which can be seen. For they are the work of an evil and selfish sorcerer. But, you, my fine lady, can set me free once more."

I hesitated, not too certain that such a repulsive creature should be free to roam about.

But the thing seemed to have read my very thoughts.

"Madam," it said softly, "my body is my prison. I cannot move about in it. For this is the body of a thing of darkness. I have been placed inside of it by sorcery."

"You mean, that is not really your appearance?"

"Indeed not, madam!"

"Then what are you?"

It sighed again. "I cannot tell you anything more. Except this one thing. Upstairs is the sorcerer. He has a key which can break this horrible spell. But you can get it from him. And when you do, you can set me free!"

It must have seen the look of doubt on my face. It continued pleading, in a desperate manner.

"Please, my lady, please! I have been waiting so very long for someone to rescue me! And I can promise you great reward if you set me free!"

... just as I approached, the heavy door slammed shut, with a booming sound that echoed throughout the building! I, too, was a prisoner!

That gave me cause for consideration. I am of noble birth, but, just the same, I have great respect and liking for new items of value.

"Very well, creature. I shall go up the stairs and see what I can find. But, mind you, I am no enchantress. I know nothing at all about sorcery. So I will make you no promise. I have no intention of angering this gentleman, and ending up like you!"

The thing again promised me great reward, and thanked me profusely.

I turned and mounted the stairs.

When I had returned to the long corridor, I stopped and looked upward at the winding steps. *This sorcerer might be able to help me—but then again, if he was evil enough to place such a spell on the creature in the cellar, I thought, perhaps it would be best to simply leave this place, as fast as possible!* So I turned into the long hallway and headed back to the heavy doors.

I found myself walking more and more quickly, as the comforting light from outside beckoned.

But just as I approached, the heavy door slammed shut, with a booming sound that echoed throughout the building!

I, too, was a prisoner! Chances of escaping the sorcerer did not look good!

Hesitantly, I turned and looked into the darkness and gloom. Then I heard strange laughter. Evidently the sorcerer was enjoying this game.

As for me—well, I thought that I had been frightened before, but nothing could match the cold fear which had me shaking now!

Then I saw him, standing down the corridor, watching me.

"So," he said, in a deep, commanding voice. "My friend in the cellar was not able to convince you to rescue him! Ha! Did he tell you that he, too, is a sorcerer? No? I thought not!"

Then he came closer: but he did not walk down the hallway. Instead, he seemed to float towards me. What a horrifying spectacle he was!

As he approached he became aware of the presence of the dagger, still clutched in my fist.

"Ah so, my lady, you think that you might be able to harm me? Very well, then, let us see how skillful you are!" With that, he had somehow managed to multiply into three.

I was facing three identical sor-

cerers, each taunting me, daring me to throw my only weapon at the correct image.

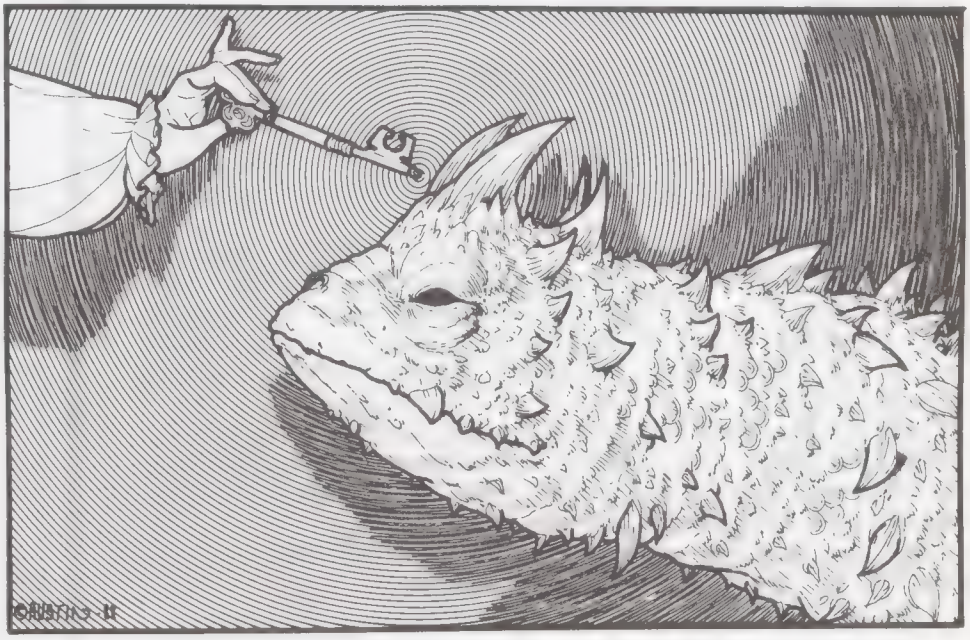
Image, I thought, *that's it!*

Swiftly I whirled, and threw the knife as well as I could at the man behind me. It found its mark.

I was extremely grateful that I had learned some of the art of defence from my beloved brother. My father had not seen the need of it, but I was thankful for Dason's ever-practical mind!

The wizard was not dead, but lay dazed and wounded. It was not difficult to finish him off. I withdrew the dagger, and cleaned the blade on the sorcerer's cloak.

I turned and looked back down the long corridor, thinking of how fortunate I had been to have seen it: the light from the staircases giving me the clue I needed to recognize that the three wizards were all illusions; for the faint illumination had shone through each image, ever so slightly. It would no doubt have been entirely unnoticeable, if not for the gloomy surroundings.



It was now an easy matter to ascend the stairs and retrieve the key. It hung on a hook by the door. It glowed faintly, and felt warm when I picked it up.

So, I thought, as I carefully went back to the cellar, *my hideous little acquaintance is a magician, too!*

I walked over to him, smiling. "I have it," I said innocently. "I've got the key!"

The creature looked astonished. It had not expected me to really retrieve the device.

I continued my innocent act. "What do I do with it to set you free?"

The thing quickly recovered its voice. "All you need do , my good lady, is to point it at me, and name what I am to become."

"You mean, just say 'man'?"

"Yes, or human will do. Please, do it quickly!"

"Wait a moment. How is it that *you* know exactly how to undo the spell? You would not happen to be a wizard as well, now would you?"

I watched the creature try to deny what I knew was true. It irked me to listen to its lies!

I listened to it plead and promise all sorts of wonderful rewards. Then I knew what I must do.

"All right," I said and aimed the point of the glowing key in the creature's direction.

The hideous monster began to tremble in anticipation. It had begun to fear that I would simply leave it in this condition.

As I pointed to magical device, I spoke the name of that which I wished the creature to become. Then I went over and picked it up.

I petted it gently and reassured it, as it alternately cursed me and pleaded.

We had come to the end of the corridor, where the empty clothing of the dead wizard lay, the body itself having drifted into tiny particles and vanished. I was relieved to find that the heavy door now opened at my touch.

"Don't worry." I spoke reassuringly to the rabbit as I placed it at my feet. "Once you have delivered me safely into my brother's hands, I *promise* that you'll become what you wish."

Aiming the point of the key once more, I made use of the spell again.

As I mounted the horse, I patted it kindly.

"*Now* I have received the rich reward which you promised me. And I shall keep my promise to you. Once you have taken me safely to the Earldom of Frewen."

I laughed like a carefree child as I urged my mount forward.

❧*Lynne Armstrong-Jones*

GOTHIC IMAGE

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The VISION of ALDAMIR

BY PAUL EDWIN ZIMMER

Hungry things from beyond the World beat against the barrier of mind. Aldamir's thoughts were interwoven with the minds of his kin into structures of pure power: adamant barrier and burning ray.

His unregarded body stood rigid with concentration among other red-haired, blue-robed forms in a tower of flaming stone.

Now and then new figures appeared, as the attack on this tower grew: then the Dark Things shifted their attentions to another of the towers guarding the Border, and figures vanished, to reappear in another tower, miles away. Fleshless black demons fluttered against the barrier: need-fire drove them back.

A thought rippled through the compound mind of the Hastur-kin, and Aldamir obediently unraveled himself from the web, and condensed his mind to a crystal calm where the roads of the future unrolled, spreading into infinity.

Branch after branch was studied minutely, while perception probed the wall of darkness, hunting some hint to tell which branching would occur.

The mental web throbbed. Aldamir felt mingled minds focus on one fork of the radiating futures. Obediently, he clarified that turning...

Dragon-headed Uoght glided toward the Border like a tower of mist. Demons thronged about him. The violet sparks of his eyes glared past the towers, at the dwellings of mortal men in the lands beyond, and down the paths of the future in Aldamir's mind, the kindred could see the forces gathering to strike...

With that brief warning they acted. Lanissa Hastur vanished from her place in the tower to appear in moonlight, shouting a warning to Lord Jagat as he stood with his army, watching the curtain of need-fire play across the black wall of the Border. Miles away, her grandson Miron brought similar warning to Istvan DiVega, commander of King Chondos's armies; and in a dozen nearby fortresses, other blue-robed immortals appeared.

Mortal warriors loosened their swords in their scabbards as the blue-robed figures vanished again, appearing in the towers just as the first wave of deadly cold sorcery rolled out of the dark.

The glittering net of need-fire that covered the Border was swept away; it had held just long enough. Through the suddenly dark spaces between the towers, thousands of twisted shapes scuttled into the light of swarming moons, but the Hasturs paid no heed: the lesser dark things could be safely left to the mortal armies behind. But others, fleshless and formless, crawling like black fire over the ground, could not be so lightly ignored. Scores of blue-robed figures vanished from the towers, and reappeared clad in flame, grouped in rings around single foes. From their fingertips and from rods and swords of power blinding bolts of need-fire converged. Demons dissolved wailing into dust, or were hurled helplessly back to their own world.

Uoght advanced, a tower of mist and darkness, eyes gleaming cold red-violet, and before him the demons of the outer dark clustered, driven toward the Hasturs by the terror behind.

Branching after branching in Aldamir's mind: so many conflicts, so many decisions to be tested and balanced, so many factors, so many paths...

Kandol Hastur-Lord, eldest and chief of his kindred, watching the futures unroll in Aldamir's mind, rippled a summoning thought through the interwoven mental web, and flaming figures flickered back to their places in the towers, as Uoght and his minions hurled a second wave of death.

A shield of silver light rose to meet it, and was swept away. Hasturs reeled, but the wave's remaining power spent itself on the screens of a dozen towers, with only a weak remnant surging past to wither the little grass left on the starlit side of the Border.

The linked minds of the Hasturs rallied, striking back with a blaze of incandescence. The Dark Things quailed. Flame-clad figures reappeared outside the towers, isolating single demons and blasting

them with fire.

Dimly the Hasturs were aware of mortal armies battling behind them against the lesser night-things that had crossed the Border, but they could give no aid.

Kandol watched the battle in Aldamir's mind, quickly warning of danger. Yet Hasturs died, and Demons escaped to hurl themselves on the mortal armies beyond, who must defend themselves as best they might with fire and silver and what pitiful magic mortal wizards could learn.

But the Dark Things were tiring: on branching after branching in Aldamir's mind, Kandol saw them waver and fall back. Once more he summoned his kin to the towers, and the rainbow-flaming barrier surged crackling from tower to tower all along the Border.

Aldamir's visualization spread through the mingled minds, and tension ebbed, and a glorious sense of victory and pride flowed through them...

Then the dragon soared up over the mountains, glowing like a coal.

Irritation married Aldamir's perfect calm, muddying for an instant the paths of the future. Of all the possible branchings, this had seemed most remote.

Frantically he refocused his mind, to bring that turning which was now reality into the center of his vision.

On line after line he saw the dragon soar triumphant past the towers to wipe out the mortal armies beyond: for the dragons, though allied to the dark, were themselves creatures of light, and thus immune to the need-fire that was the most potent weapon of the Hasturs.

Vast wings cast red light over dust and stone. Dark Things whimpered and crawled away.

Yarkaroth was the dragon's name: for a thousand years, he had slumbered in a hidden lair in the north. His flesh was molten stone. He weight could crush buildings; a blow of his tail topple stone walls.

Aldamir saw the Dark Things rally on line after line, following the dragon across the Border. He held his mind to desperate clarity, while his kinsmen scanned the fanwork of futures, hunting some road on which the dragon could be turned aside or slain.

He felt their excitement as they found it: felt Elenius slip from the net of mind and flicker into existence nearly three hundred miles to the north, on the shores of the great inland sea.

The dragon neared, glowing like hot iron: air screamed under his wings as he swept past the clouds, mountain-tall form of Uoght.

Miron joined him, and two minds dipped into the ocean. Water spouted into the air. A hundred willing minds reached up to help. Above the surging waves, a floating sphere of water grew.

Sudden wild winds raged in the upper sky, as Earagon Hastur reached out drawing clouds towards the Border, while Herstes Hastur raised the spirit of storm.

The dragon neared, glowing like hot iron: air screamed under his wings as he swept past the clouds, mountain-tall form of Uoght.

Hundreds of powerful minds pushed, rolling the great ball of water southward through the air.

Yarkaroth swept through the flaming barrier between the towers. Earagon crushed clouds together: rain sizzled into steam on the dragon's wings. Startled, he swerved, circling around Agnasta tower, back into the darkness...

The sluggish ball of water crawled through air. Something was wrong. There was not time. Aldamir let the visualization fade from his mind as he added his power to the task of forcing water through air...

Kandol's mind found his in the crush, and summoning him back, laid his own visualization of the future into Aldamir's mind. It was hazy, unfinished: Aldamir concentrated, and at once the image blossomed into sharper detail; branches spreading wider, the chains of cause and effect clearing...

Kandol hunted out the parting of the ways, and the roots of the roads where the dragon turned back, seeking for the unseen factor. Time was running out: Yarkaroth wheeled out of the Shadow in a cloud of steam

Kandol found what he sought; saw what must be done. Doubt filled both minds. It was such a slender chance: far more water than their powers could carry was needed to quench the dragon. Only fear could stop him... And no one had ever shifted such a mass before...

Swiftly, Kandol summoned Orillus, Elidor and Narmasil, the three whose power most nearly matched his own, and flashed into their minds the necessary knowledge.

Then, calling together a quarter of his kindred, he reached out for the huge ball of water that was still so far in the north...

With a snap of his tail, Yarkaroth dove away from the Border, gigantic wings fanning as he climbed. Steam trailed behind him as rain vaporized against his flanks.

Air pressure slowed the floating ball of water as the united minds stopped pushing. Kandol clamped firmly on a quarter of the mass, draping the minds of the younger Hasturs around his own, and gave each mind a swirl of molecules...

Yarkaroth broke through the clouds, into the light of moon and star. The wide wings gave a final flap, then stretched out stiffly, cutting shrieking air as he swooped in a long deadly glide...

A sudden lake appeared in the air before him.

He swerved, startled, but one wing tip dipped through, and the roar that burst from the great jaws hummed through the stones of Agnasta tower, and shook the walls of mortal homes.

Orillus had watched Kandol carefully, and now a swift surge of trained minds linked to throw a second liquid globe into the dragon's path. On one branching in Aldamir's mind, Yarkaroth plunged through, to land, raging with pain, in the midst of the mortal armies below...

But, this time, Yarkaroth banked sharply and veered away.

Narmasil, youngest of the four, sent his body to the center of the floating mass of water. Lanissa and Merimas joined him there, at the focus of a hundred helpful minds, and a moment later the third giant drop appeared.

Even as Elidor prepared to shift the remaining water, Aldamir called frantically to those who had aided Kandol and Orillus, for he saw the Dark Things attacking on line after line of the futures in his mind...

Four giant drops of water flowed into one. Some branches showed him fleeing: on some he plunged through. Aldamir watched...

At a thought from Kandol, the great ball of water rolled to meet the dragon, and Yarkaroth, unnerved by the water's sudden appearance, and hearing the rain boiling on his wings, wheeled in the air, lashing his tail to steer him back to the Shadow.

Demons scattered as he flew flaming across the Border. Vast pinions beat as the glowing, serpentine form soared into darkness, swerving to avoid the misty, towering shape of Uoght.

The lines on which the Dark Things rallied and attacked began to fade from Aldamir's mind, and he could feel the quickly-smothered irritation of those he had called back to duty on a false alarm.

Atop the gigantic, murky column, Uoght's head swiveled, following the dragon's flight with baleful eyes, until the coal-red glow vanished.

Now only a handful of the Dark Things remained, cowering before Uoght.

Water settled earthward, rolling through the screen of need-fire toward the clustered demons. At a brief thought from Kandol, many minds reached to seize on atoms and shatter the patterns they made: with a flash like lightning, the water was gone. A strange-smelling wind blew down on the clustering demons.

A spark from Kandol's mind turned the wind to fire—fire that turned to water as it burned. Dark Things fled: some caught and burned like pitch, or vanished suddenly, hurled into the Dark World.

Uoght's head swiveled: the murky shaft beneath rippled and swayed as the regent of the Dark Lords flowed toward the Border. Bolts of flame flew from the towers: black veils rose to absorb them; and the linked minds of the Hasturs burned with the hate that ruffled the mind of Kandol Hastur-Lord, who had tried to drive Uoght from the world for five thousand years...

Aldamir saw the twin suns rising in his mind, and could find no line on which the Dark Things rallied before dawn. But, distrustful now of his prevision, he watched as Uoght neared Agnasta Tower, gliding contemptuously through waves of flame...

He loomed above the Tower, very close now. The misty pillar dipped and swayed over the tower's roof, while need-fire surged brighter and higher...

Then, slowly, Uoght glided back from the towers, and the cloudy column of his body thinned and faded, dissolving into the murk of the Shadow.

Then, more slowly, the black dragon-head faded, and there was nothing but the cold violet fire of his eyes.

Then those, too, were gone, and the golden moons of the dawn were paling as the twin suns rose in truth; and peering down the web of tangled branchings, Aldamir could see no attack the next night, nor the night after, no any sign of such another major assault against the Border for seven or even perhaps ten years...

Dimly through the Shadow the Hasturs could sense frenzied scrambling as the Night-Things hid themselves.

The vast fusion broke into separate minds. Blue-robed figures vanished, scattering to the great Hastur-cities across the world—Carcosa, Arimna, Idelbonn—with only a rested handful replacing them in the watch on the Borer.

But deep in the minds of all his kin, Aldamir's chagrin gnawed like a cancer.

No one can see all paths, Melissa Hastur thought. Soft enfolding comfort flowed from her, but as Aldamir be-

gan to melt into the warmth, he sensed beneath—what? Pity? Scorn?

A cold shell grew around his mind.

She protested as his aloofness forced their minds apart, until barely touching, they fell into the formality of worded thoughts.

Why do you let the future obsess you so? You see more than others. That does not mean you can—or should—see everything... Her mind pleaded at the wall around his own. *Others see less than you! Why can you not be content with your gifts? Why long for Power none has ever possessed?*

I cannot even make sense of what I do see! he snapped. *What good is that?*

Great good! Warm, praising thought washed against the shell around his mind.

But the depths of her mind were still hidden from him, and he feared what might lie beneath.

They withdrew into their bodies, apart, alone, two beings in the crystal-walled room, here at Idelbonn where the Hasturs rule the fires of Inner Earth.

Lava cooled far below them, in the living volcano's core. Its flame had served its purpose now.

The city's sleeping-rooms were filled with Aldamir's exhausted kin: they had fallen from the air into their beds. In all that vast city, only Aldamir and Melissa were awake.

Behind the thin shell that masked his thoughts, Aldamir cleared a part of his mind free from the murk of rage and self-doubt, to create a crystal calm in which the roads of the future could unroll once more. With the cold formality of worded thoughts, he thanked her for the cakes she had brought, as though she had not been able to taste his delight while he had eaten.

She touched his mask in a timid caress, and then, when he did not open to her further, was gone. He sat staring into the center of his mind.

Along the side-spreading roads he could see carious results of what he knew to be his foolishness: he could just make out the fading roads forever closed. he yearned for the warm, enfolding closeness which he had denied himself: hurt and anger dissolving in the cradling embrace of intermingled minds.

He rolled his mind in upon itself, and watched the network of golden lines spreading to infinity. He saw thunderstorms gather above the Sea of Ardren, and further north, snowstorms sweeping over Thernhelm into Kadar.

But outside Jyoran Tower, where he saw himself on line after line, the next day would be bright and clear...

Bright and sunlit, on line after line. A few lines only, unlikely, placed him elsewhere: on the Ice Planet, or oversea in Y'gora, or nearby in Agnasta; only strange disaster, danger to the Hydean Gate, or a sudden attack from Sarlow...

Thousands of lines branched from each, yet, on many thousands more, he would watch Jyoran Tower with Miron and young Vardanis, with the Shadow on one side and the bright light of the twin suns on the other...

And Vardanis would suggest a raid on the Pure-In-Blood...

That rose in line after line, nearly as inevitable as the weather: Vardanis was so young—not even out of his mortal years...

Yet there was no harm in it. Most lines held no danger, for the Dark Rulers of the Pure-In-Blood, who exchanged "protection" for Sacrifice, were still weakened. Only a few lines showed danger...

But then, he had not foreseen the dragon...

So many things he had not foreseen! Only a chance encounter by a mortal Border Patrol had given them the warning that had kept the Dark Things from whelming half-manned towers and sweeping away the Border before its guardians could react. Even though he had seen that the attack in the north had been a feint, he had not been able to see where and when the attack would come...

Even in the womb he had known the touch of other minds supporting him. Now he yearned for the touch of another mind.

There was no need for loneliness: his kin were all around him: any would comfort him if he called to them...

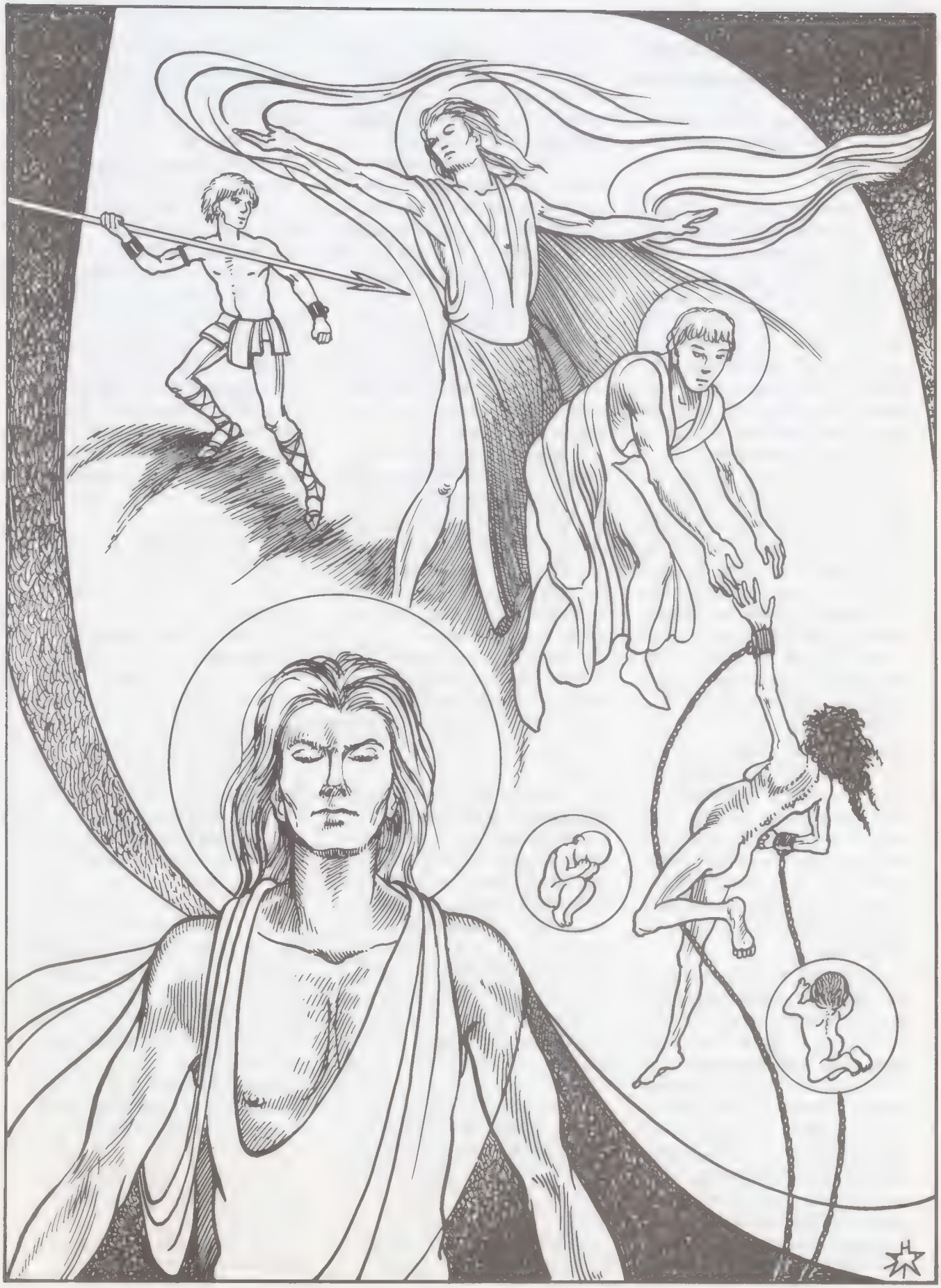
But he did not reach out. This way, at least, he could spare them the pain he felt—nor sense emotions swirling as pity or annoyance hid in the furthest deep corners of their minds.

For now, this strange and bitter loneliness was best.

The next day dawned as bright and clear as Aldamir had foreseen: he sat in Jyoran Tower, and watched sunlight pour like rain down upon the miles of glaring desert sand.

Here the Border guarded only the great Southern Desert, a barren, haunted waste, where no man dwelt, and which few caravans dared cross. But once, long ago, the Shadow had covered it, to split the continent almost in half: menacing Darna in the west and Alferrida to the east, and driving the ancestors of the N'lantians out of the mountains that ringed their domain.

Then the Hastur-kin had thrown up this line of towers, and now cascades of falling sunlight made the sand glow in the south, but north of Jyoran, dark magic and masses of haze strained the light, dimmed and darkened it where, a thousand years before, the Dark-



VISION of ALDAMIR

Things had swept over the ancient mountain strongholds of the Takkarian kings.

Those who escaped had sired the mountain Stassians, and the Bordermen who dwelt in the south of Tarencia, but not all the Takkars had been so fortunate.

In tiny fertile areas on the southern slopes of the mountains lived the descendents of those who, trapped in the mountains, had submitted to the Dark Things, to become slaves and herd animals to the creatures of the Shadow.

The Dark Lords had set human, or almost-human, Sorcerers to rule five cruel tribes in the lands which mortal poets named the Black Kingdoms: they swooped down to raid the rare caravans that still dared the desert, or attacked isolated Stassian outposts. They carried off prisoners to eat, or to labour in wide, slave-tended fields, raising the grain that fed the armies of the Shadow.

Now their numbers were shrinking:" for their minds had been twisted to resemble those of their masters; and they ate each other as well as their slaves, and their Dark Masters ate them both. During this long siege, they had doubtless eaten the last of their slaves, and would be starting on the children now...

This suffering and cruelty, so near on the Shadow-shrouded southern slopes, always troubled the warders of Jyoran Tower: the glassy cloud where the Dark Things hid was here too thin to blind the minds of Hastur's children entirely. And so, despite all danger, those who watched at Jyoran would often dare the Shadow, flickering in and back again, to rescue slaves or steal infants—for the children, if stolen from their parents young enough, and raised far from the Shadow, free from the ways that twisted the minds of their kin, would grow up human enough. It was all that could be done. But many Hasturs had been killed in such raids.

While Aldamir waited for Vardanis to say what he knew he would say—for he had heard it on line after line—he let the future unroll like a mystic blossom in his mind. No attack, on any path, not even a raiding party, for days...

Which village would Vardanis choose? They all ached with suffering and cruelty: each held children who would be turned into monsters—if their parents or their masters did not eat them...

He watched the Shadow with a part of his mind, while he studied the spreading petals of the future. A Demon was moving leisurely through the hills above the villages, but there seemed little danger, for Aldamir foresaw that when it reached the village they would have seized the child and gone...

Line branched out from line after line, spreading to eternity from thousands of possible presents. But how, Aldamir wondered, could he ever tell which path he was on already?

Vardanis, probing the Shadow with his mind, spoke, silently...

Three days ago, I was resting between attacks in the Golden Isles, and I saw a woman of Kath, whose Aura raged with despair because no Healer had yet been able to cure her barrenness! Yet only a few miles from here are children whose parents may eat them, or feed them to the Dark Things as a sacrifice.

The Border is quiet after long fighting: the Dark Things Weary with war.

Miron answered with a vision of a dingy village street, where dirty naked children played: then the mind drew back, to show the village, and the grey bare ridges rising above the straw roofs, where a black, clotted blackness crawled. *It comes for sacrifice,* he thought.

Aldamir stirred: his mind focused on the playing children.

Those are too old, he thought sadly: *their minds too twisted. We have tried before...*

There! Vardanis thought. An infant glowed... *And there!*

Guard the Tower, Aldamir, Miron thought, and vanished.

Vardanis vanished.

Aldamir watched them appear in the village a few miles off: comparing as he watched various paths of the present and future with this one that now was real. Did any of the innumerable tiny, almost imperceptible variations matter? Only three lines held danger...

He scanned them restlessly, and as he shifted focus to look at those dangers, he reeled. It was already upon them...

Vardanis and Miron snatched naked babies from the ground, while veiled women scattered, screaming.

Another scream sounded from a field nearby.

"*Lord!*" a woman's voice shrieked. "*Lord Hastur! Help! Don't leave me here!*"

Naked, whip-scarred, bulging with child, an emaciated slave-woman raced toward the two Hasturs even as they vanished.

They had thought all the slaves of the Pure-In-Blood already eaten...

Miron laid the child he had seized on the Hastur-Tower's floor, and vanished again.

The naked woman ran across plowed earth.

In the hills above the village, the crawling blackness, sensing the turmoil, blurred into sudden motion.

One of the Pure-In-Blood that guarded the field drew back his spear and threw.

Vardanis dropped a second child beside the first.

The spear in the air hurtled toward the slave's scarred back.

A blue-robed shape appeared in the woman' path.

The flying spear skittered aside as though glancing from glass.

Darkness like black fire seethed keening out of the hills, and even as Miron opened his arms to the running slave, the demon loomed above him like a black wave.

Vardanis blocked its path, need-fire flaring from his hands.

The black wave rolled back. The sobbing slave threw her arms around Miron's neck, and another guard threw a second spear.

Miron's arms wrapped around the weeping slave, and both vanished.

The spear flew through the air where they had been, and buried itself in Vardanis's back.

Aldamir leaped from the Tower.

Vardanis staggered: shielding need-fire flickered. Black fire surged in.

Aldamir flared as a bolt of blinding need-fire in the field. The Demon burst, burning: the Pure-In-Blood clapped pale hands over their eyes.

Vardanis fell into Aldamir's arms: Aldamir twisted space around them...

Back in the tower, the rescued slave was sobbing and stolen infants screamed: Aldamir laid Vardanis on the floor. But he knew already that the young man was dead. The face was only half-eaten bone: the ribs gnawed away around the spearpoint...

So young! Barely thirty, hardly more than a child...

Again Aldamir had failed to foresee...

Aldamir brooded, alone, scanning endless branching chains of cause and effect as they bloomed in his mind, trying to forget the crumpled, pitted bone of Vardanis's face...

Stone walls around him did not matter, nor the humming chorus of the minds of his kins, nor all the endless mutter of the wide world's thought: the murmuring of men and beasts and plants...

Tressil would be a third sun indeed before the Dark Things prepared another assault against the Border—but that would be such an attack as the World had not seen in a thousand years. On path after path he saw the dark roll over the Towers, shattering them like glass.

He glanced down long lines of years, over ages, watching the black blotch spread, a blight eating the world...

His mind ran down chain after chain, and again and again he saw the end: the Dark Lords bursting forth to feast upon the world, to devour stars and living things and the fertile earth itself. Stone alone would last: the opal sea, the dusted starlight, all must perish, and, life gone, death itself would die and lie like some grim skeleton upon the sand...

What use his powers? What use this war? What matter if doom came in ages or hours, if the end were sure? Line after line he scanned, seeking hope, but found, instead, another danger: unskilled fingers on the Anthir-Stone bringing galaxies exploding from the tiny metal cube...

He hurled his mind up line after line, in a search for hope. Innumerable tiny glittering threads fanned out infinitely before him, shifting as small details changed the world. How could he ever hope to explore them all?

Even the present was uncertain, a bundle of strands so much alike they could not be told apart...

To see into the future was simple enough: even mortals did at times. but events that stood out boldly, and were easily foreseen, were all too often rooted in some obscure cause, lost in the webwork of time.

To see the future was one thing, to understand it another, and the more you saw, the harder it was...

Shaking off despair once more he stretched himself across the spreading tree of futures, trying to find some fork, some branch that led past doom...

On thousands of paths he saw himself—making decisions, choosing paths—but most often, following the paths chosen by others...

Then, up one path, he saw something very strange.

Reaching for it, he found it free of the resonance of doom. Dimly he glimpsed himself—isolated, distrusted, feared by his kin...

He seized upon this path, launched himself upon it, seeking the key to this riddle...

He glimpsed ancient powers—the Narsil-Stone found, the Anthir-Stone rightly used, the lost crown and ring...

But there was some factor missing, some hidden element yet untapped. He stretched himself out, on a quest to the mind's furthest unnamed shore, to find and engulf that key...

If the World lasted, if the World were to be saved...

When mortals saw the future, what they saw was, for the most part, hints of threatened disaster.

The key he groped for slipped in his grasp...

...hints of disaster, echoes of horror fleeing back in time, falling along the link of memory...

...memory...

If the World were saved, the Dark Things defeated, while Aldamir yet lived...

Could he not then, by an act of will, hurl his memory back through Time?

Could he not *now*, by an act of

VISION of ALDAMIR

will, force himself to *remember* to send his memory back through Time? To *remember* the future...

To remember, second by second, that one safe path through the maze, to prime his mind to, second by second, send memory back and, second by second, foresee that memory...

He concentrated, trying to train his mind to that remembering...to hurl his memory back through time, clearing a path through the maze...looking forward, to receive...

Foresight met memory. Time dissolved.

Eons rolled by in a momentary flash of vision that lasted through out those Eons...

Present and future were one with the past: all choices were made...

And Aldamir saw the path he *must* walk, second by second, through all the long ages...

He saw the World changing as the ages passed: saw his own kin change as he outlived generations of Immortals...

He saw himself striding boldly into the Council of the Empowered, to cow them all with a warning...saw himself throw a flower to a table to send a young mortal man on a quest...saw his kin die on the path he had forced on them...saw himself feared and hated by his kin...

He saw the Universe where the Dark Lords ruled, where the stars were holes in space...watched as the Dark Lords squirmed and thrashed and fled from figures robed in fire...

He saw men greater than gods, striding the spaces between the Worlds, with need-fire glowing on their swords, and flaming in the depths of their eyes...

He saw himself alone through all the ages, his mind a sealed, maddening blur, which none among his kin could read...

Ages blended in his mind. Ancient and strange, he faced a man of another age and time, who needed his power, as he laid his power down...

Then this blurred, eternal now would end. Then, endless boredom over, something would happen he did not foresee. Then he would know Time again.

Then he could rest.

❧*Paul Edwin Zimmer*

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Mary Rose and the DEVIL

by Stephen C. Fisher

Sister Mary Rose stopped me as I was coming into the school building.

"Martha," she said, fixing her gaze on me, "did I not just see you riding in on a *boy's* bicycle?" Sister Mary Rose is mad because they never let her take part in the Spanish Inquisition. Torquemada thought she was too severe.

"Yes, Sister, you did," I answered in a small voice. "My bicycle is broken and my brother let me use his because he's gone to college."

"Is your mother working today?" she asked. I nodded dumbly. "Then you may ride it home this afternoon, but never bring it here again. You would do better to walk. Remember, no girl who rides a boy's bicycle can keep her honor long."

"But—" I began, but she had turned on one iron heel and walked away. I did not appreciate the prospect of having to walk the three miles each way to school, but there was no point in objecting. Mary Rose terrified the other nuns almost as much as she did the pupils, and her every word was Law. That went double when she was trying to protect us from the peril of The Terrible Thing Protestant Girls Do.

School wore on through the usual first-day routine. My algebra teacher was the only one sadistic enough to give us homework, so I had only one book to drop into the basket on the prohibited bicycle for the trip home. It was a nifty bike, a blue Swiss ten-speed that probably would have gone straight up the Matterhorn in low low gear, and I sighed at the idea of letting it rot in the garage while I walked to school or rode my old clunker, assuming it could be fixed at all. I caressed the headlamp for a moment before hopping on and pedalling off.

I got up to full speed and whizzed down the road, my hair and skirt trailing in the wind. The road was lovely fresh blacktop, so smooth I could almost believe I was flying. A fresh green scent greeted me as I entered the patch of woods between the older part of town and the development where I lived.

Suddenly I actually was in the air, at least for a moment. The handlebars of the bicycle had turned into powerful hands grasping mine and I was whirled around and clasped to a strong male body. He was tall and fair and beautiful, and his robe was the same blue the bicycle had been. We were standing beside the road and he was murmuring into my ear, "Martha, Martha my beautiful, I have loved you for so long and waited for this moment so anxiously. Come, my sweet, my tender one."

My heart was beating a thousand times a minute. I hugged him and kissed him and walked with him a few steps into the woods where a bed of honeysuckle was waiting for us. He lay me upon it and sank down beside me; my hands reached for his lovely blue robe as his reached for my dime-store underpants.

"Begone, Orgebiel, you spawn of darkness! Leave this child of the light in peace!" cried an all-too-familiar voice. Sister Mary Rose was standing beside the road, my battered algebra book at her feet. Behind her I could see Sister Catherine in the old black Ford she drove. In her right hand Sister Mary Rose was holding out toward us the big cross she always wore around her neck. "In the Name of the Father—"

She didn't even have to complete the sentence. My lover was gone, vanished, blue robe and all, leaving me in disheveled frustration on the honeysuckle. I knew I would never see him or Kevin's bicycle again. A tear rolled down one of my cheeks. Yet I barely noticed it for the wonder I felt, as I silently asked the question I did not dare speak aloud: Sister Mary Rose—*how did she know his name?*

To Agent Or not to Agent

by Thomas J. King, Jr.

Different Point of View

In the September 1987 issue of the *Science Fiction and Fantasy Workshop Newsletter* (Vol. 6, No. 72), edited by Kathleen Woodbury out of Salt Lake City, two published writers discussed their experiences with getting their novels published, and their encounters with agents. Jefferson P. Swycaffer, author of five published SF books, stated that "You don't need an agent until you've already completed a book or three, and certainly not until you've had two or more stories published", while first-novelist Kathy Tyers commented that "Frankly, I'd recommend that a writer without publications credits market her own work". My experience has been unusual as an author, and I'd like to argue for a different point of view.

Historical Monologue

Succinctly, I secured a well-respected New York agent with only a completed hard/social SF novel manuscript, no short story sales or sales of any sort, and after a nice rejection note from Houghton Mifflin on the novel. I did it on the advice of a writer with two books out who lived in the same Colorado town as I did. Karl Hansen told me, when I called him, that I should go ahead and write to an agent for representation—even if I had not sale credits—so long as I had a *completed* novel manuscript. He pointed out sagely that an agent is interested in whether you have anything he/she can immediately put on the market; assuming of course you know how to tell a story. I followed his advice, was quickly signed up by my agency, revised my first manuscript based on editorial suggestions by my agent, wrote my second novel, and then began writing my third novel. After two years of serious writing on novels, I have a first novel sale of my second novel RETREAD SHOP to Warner Books (in only six months after my agent ran it by three publishers), a short story of mine got an Honorable Mention and Semi-Finalist rating in the June 1987 Writers of the Future contest, and I'm now writing full-time on my 4th-7th novels. My agent also managed to get Warner Books to look at two of my novels (#1 and #3) as the Option Book, rather than just one. And the agency got some helpful changes in the standard contract. To date, I have yet to make a short story sale, although my WOTF story may sell soon to a semi-prozine.

The point of this historical monologue is to encourage talented, aspiring writers out there to see beyond the standard How-To-Write Books advice of "write short stories for years, build a readership, try a novel, spend two years selling it on your own, then look for more years of scraping by" until your second novel sells. Frankly, I'm too prolific a writer and too determined to accept such a plodding approach. With respect, I have stories to tell, and so long as I write a lot, take my chances, and remember I'm a beginner in a decades-long process of learning the craft, I have no hesitancy in pushing myself and my sale potential.

Challenging Two Traditional Concepts

In essence, I'm challenging two traditional concepts—that you "have to sell a few novels on your own before you can get an agent", and that you "have to sell short stories before you have a chance of selling a novel". In my case, writing two novels in six months actually brought me from a miserable short story writing ability to something approaching journeyman status—in my own estimation. And

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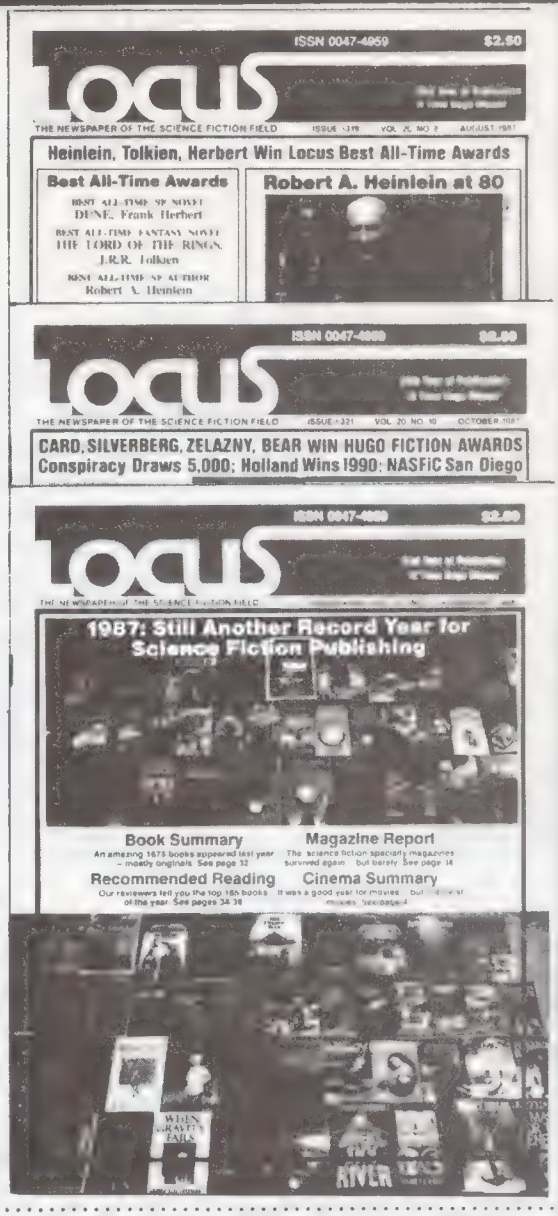
Marion Zimmer Bradley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AGENT ???

while having an agent, as I've told another novel writer, probably did not get me more money on my first sale than if I'd done it on my own, it *did* get me two years of publishing house exposure in seven months for my two completed novels. So, seeking an agent even before your first story or novel sale—*if* you have a completed novel manuscript that's a good story and well-written—is worth thinking about.

"Short Cuts"

When I hear from fellow writing correspondents how they spent 6, 12 or 18 months waiting to hear from *one* publishing house on an "over-the-transom" novel submission, and nearly all of them lack an agent, I want to help push them to seek legitimate "short cuts" in the *marketing* end of writing. As anyone who's *done* real writing will tell you, there is no shortcut beyond writing, writing, and writing tens of thousands of words. It is in the writing that you learn about yourself, your abilities, your deficiencies, your inspirations, and reap the sweet honey of being at the crest-wave of competing, on your own, to achieve your vision.

"...writing, writing, and writing tens of thousands of words. It is in the writing that you learn about yourself, your abilities, your deficiencies, your inspirations, and reap the sweet honey of being at the crest-wave of competing, on your own, to achieve your vision."

Paean for Agents???

This is not an unabashed paean for agents. They have their faults, which include "telegraphic" written responses, and replying to only 3 of 6 questions in the letter you sent them. But they are well worth having. They get paid when they make a sale for you. And a *minority* of legitimate agents *will* accept an unpublished writer with a completed manuscript in hand who shows good promise.

A Simple Rule

In other respects when comparing agent attention to a writer, I've learned a simple rule—the greater your potential for earning the agent some money, the more attention (in timely letters, phone calls, personal attention) you're likely to get. I noticed a significant increase in the amount of personal attention I got from my agent *after* he sold my novel. And since I have two finished novels "on tap" for sale plus a partial for a third, I've done my job as a writer to give the agent something he/she can sink their teeth into and *sell*. For both our benefits.

Personal Recommendations...

My agent? He's Richard McEnroe of the Adele Leone Agency of New York, and I am quite pleased with the professional, conscientious attention and marketing exposure I've gotten. The senior agent and owner of the firm, Adele Leone, has also been kind, helpful and determined in my behalf. Other agents I've either seen in person and been impressed with, or heard good things about, are Ashley Grayson of California and Ricia Mainhardt of New York. If you've just sold your book to a publisher but haven't signed the contract yet, *do* contact an agent! If you're interested in finding an agent, the SFWA Directory is a good place to start. But the best guides to an agent are a personal recommendation from someone who's in their stable, and *your* personal comfort with the agent's style. Like getting married, it's not something to do hastily. Research who's around, ask questions, think a bit, and then write to one if that's your decision.

Above all, keep on writing !

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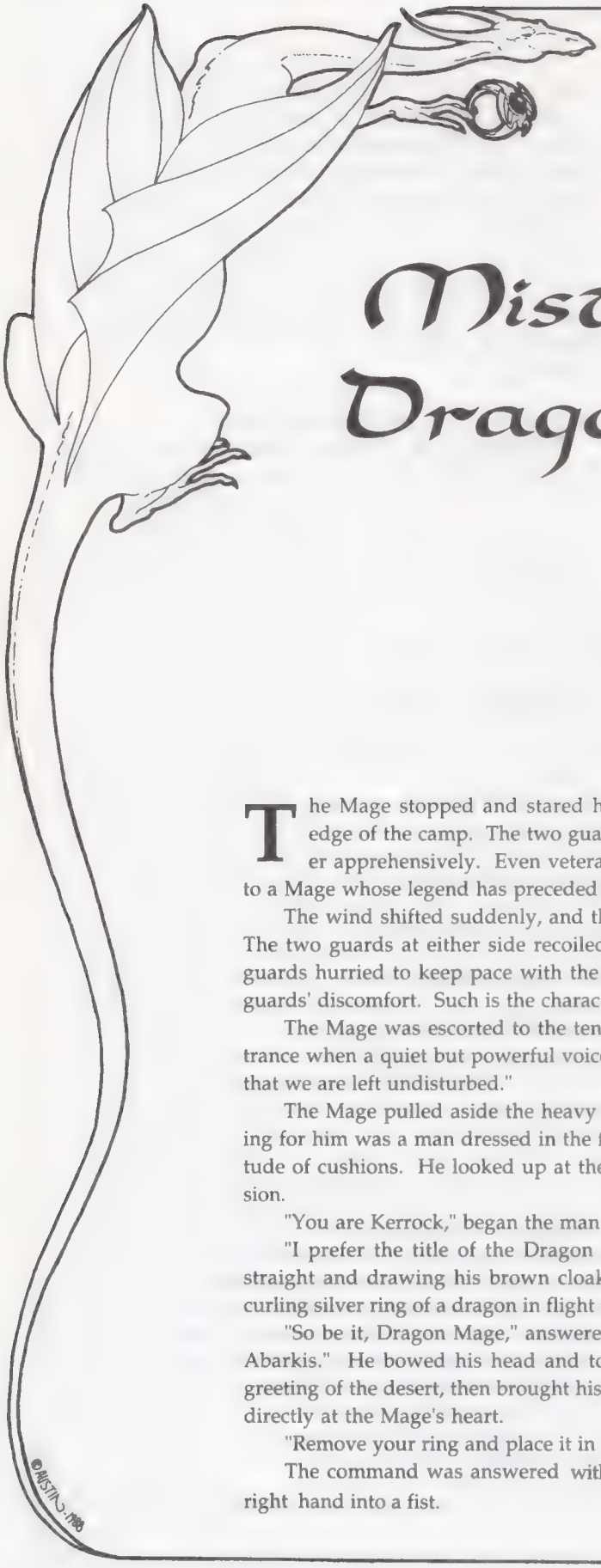


Mistaking the Dragon Mage

by Terry O'Brien

The Mage stopped and stared hard at the carcass of a dragon being butchered at the edge of the camp. The two guards escorting him also stopped and glanced at each other apprehensively. Even veterans such as they were deferential to a Mage. Especially to a Mage whose legend has preceded him.

The wind shifted suddenly, and the acrid stench from the carcass drifted towards them. The two guards at either side recoiled in disgust, but the Mage calmly continued. The two guards hurried to keep pace with the Mage's long stride. The Mage took little notice of his guards' discomfort. Such is the character of Mages.

The Mage was escorted to the tent near the center of the camp. They stopped at the entrance when a quiet but powerful voice called out from within. "Only our guest. Guards, see that we are left undisturbed."

The Mage pulled aside the heavy cloth of the tent and stepped into the dim light. Waiting for him was a man dressed in the flowing robes of the desert raiders, reclining on a multitude of cushions. He looked up at the Mage with a look of mingled pleasure and apprehension.

"You are Kerrock," began the man.

"I prefer the title of the Dragon Mage," said the Mage forcefully, drawing himself up straight and drawing his brown cloak together with his right hand, the hand that bore the curling silver ring of a dragon in flight that is his namesake.

"So be it, Dragon Mage," answered the man. "Your legend has preceded yourself. I am Abarkis." He bowed his head and touched his left hand to his forehead in the traditional greeting of the desert, then brought his right hand into view, holding a loaded crossbow aimed directly at the Mage's heart.

"Remove your ring and place it in the box at your feet," Abarkis commanded.

The command was answered with a cold stare by the Mage and the clenching of his right hand into a fist.

"The dragon magic in your ring is indeed fast and quite deadly," said Abarkis, "but a crossbow is equally deadly, and is much faster."

The Mage looked from the crossbow down to his fist, then slowly unclenched it and drew the ring off his finger. He stooped and placed the ring within the wooden box.

"Close the lid."

The Mage stood and flipped the lid shut with his booted foot, hearing it latch shut, then stepped back.

"That is all. you may go now," said Abarkis, dismissing the Mage while uncocking his crossbow and laying it to the side.

The Mage cocked his head, as if he had not heard correctly. "Why?" he asked quietly.

Abarkis laughed from his stomach, a deep rolling laugh. "Of all the questions to ask, you ask why. Well, why what?"

"Why did you want my ring?" the Mage replied calmly. "Why are you willing to let me leave? If you wanted only my ring, why didn't you just kill me? And why should I leave without my ring, my namesake?"

Abarkis laughed again. "Obviously my reputation is not as widespread as yours. I am better known as Abarkis Dragons'-scourge, and I and my men destroy dragons. Any and all dragons." He grinned under his moustache. "For a price, although sometimes for practice. And this time," he said, pointing at the wooden box, "for principle." "As for why I am letting you go without killing you, I see no reason to. You are no threat to me now."

The Mage threw back his cloak and raised his cupped hands before him, which began to glow in the darkness with a silver light. "I was a Mage before I fought the Dragon, and your crossbow is no longer so quick."

Abarkis drew back his tunic and bared his chest, revealing a wealth of cabalistic signs and runes. "I do not fear you and your Mage's magic. I am proof against any sword or spell, claw or accident. Save that of a dragon."

The Mage stepped forward, relaxing his hands. Abarkis grinned broadly. "I see you recognize the runes and the power bound in them."

The Mage nodded slowly. "I also see why you kill Dragons."

"It is quite profitable," Abarkis chuckled. "I and my men are very expensive, but very experienced."

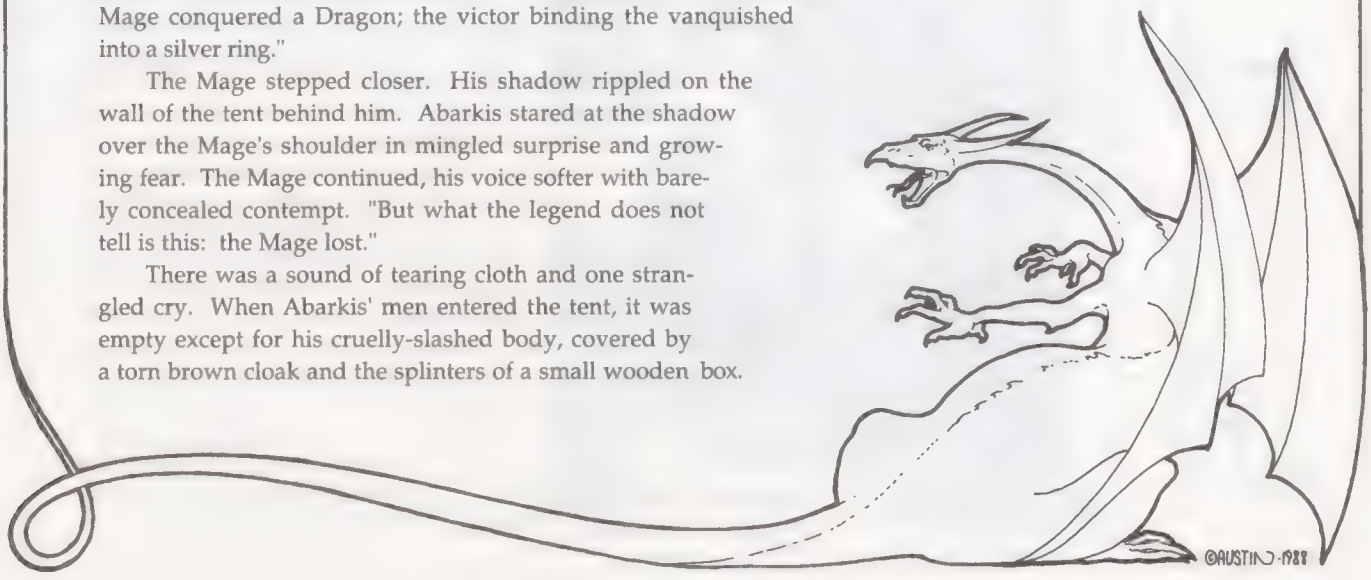
"And just how many Dragons have you and your men killed in your career?" asked the Mage coldly.

"Since when have Mages begun to care for Dragons?" Abarkis laughed scornfully at the Mage, who returned him a cold, hard glare. "Mages and Dragons are arch-rivals for mastery in sorcerous power; your legend is only the latest in a wealth of such tales."

The Mage continued, his voice resonating through the tent. "My legend has preceded me, you said. The legend of how a great Mage conquered a Dragon; the victor binding the vanquished into a silver ring."

The Mage stepped closer. His shadow rippled on the wall of the tent behind him. Abarkis stared at the shadow over the Mage's shoulder in mingled surprise and growing fear. The Mage continued, his voice softer with barely concealed contempt. "But what the legend does not tell is this: the Mage lost."

There was a sound of tearing cloth and one strangled cry. When Abarkis' men entered the tent, it was empty except for his cruelly-slashed body, covered by a torn brown cloak and the splinters of a small wooden box.



EDITORIAL

NASTY WORDS...

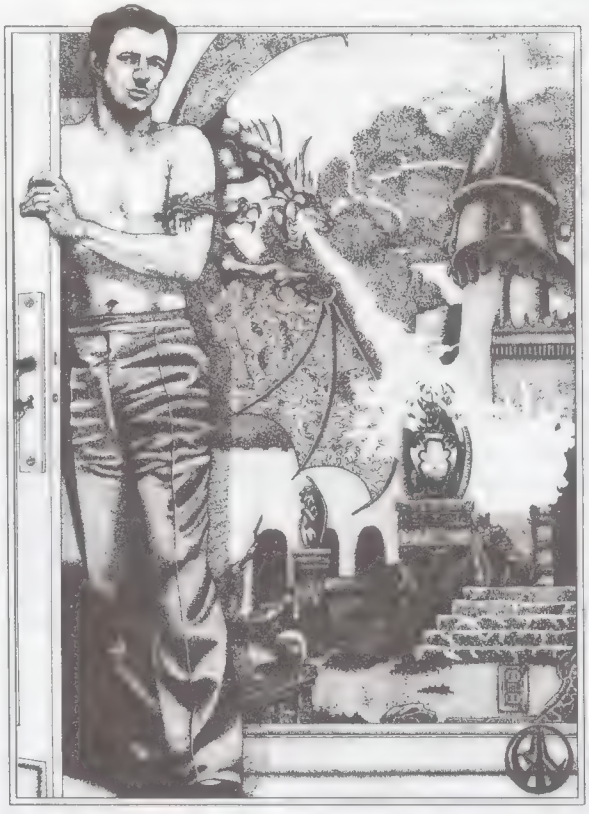
Heaven knows, publishing and production are hard enough without starting off on this subject, which I wish had never come up. Ethics in the field tend to be situational, and vary from moment to moment, and publisher to publisher; but sometimes there comes a situation on which an editor must take a stand. *Plagiarism* is a very nasty word; *copyright infringement* also. Most editors hope heartily that they will never have to mention either one.

But it's happened.

ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATION ???

In the very first issue, yet, we published a story called "Golden Vanity" and commissioned an illustration for it. When it came in, we liked it, paid the artist and commissioned more work by the same artist. Imagine our shock when it was called to our attention that an issue of *Epic Illustrated* magazine, published in 1980, contained an illustration by Thomas Blackshear which was dangerously similar to the "Golden Vanity" illustration.

Now, I have been guilty (and I think perhaps every would-be artist has) of looking at someone else's illustration to see how they handle draperies, shadows, or the position of hands; but I am not talking about look-alikes, I am talking about *direct copying*.



The artist's explanation was that he had only used Blackshear's illustration for "inspiration" and added that such "swipes" were "commonplace".

We apologize, sincerely and profoundly, to Ariel Books, who hold the copyright, Marvel Comics, Thomas Blackshear, and to whoever else may have been affected.

NOTICE:

We're delivering notice here and now that every manuscript and every piece of artwork must be original and the property of the author or artist. We thought that was implicit in selling artwork or stories.

As the old saying goes: "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me."

Marion Zimmer Bradley

[Thomas Blackshear's illustration published courtsey of Ariel Books.]

Programming the Centipede

Complaints

One reader said about the first issue of this column: "Is (MZB) writing for writers, or for readers?" He seemed to think that, as long as there were writer's magazines, there was no place in a magazine for a special column addressed to the would-be writer.

Well, as I said in the first issue; for a long time after entering active fandom, it seemed that every fan I met wanted to be a writer. And, judging by the letters that come in, a lot of them still do. In spite of complaints that schools today don't teach reading or writing, when I taught a class at a local private high school, and asked if any of them still wanted to be writers, *every kid in the class* raised his or her hand; including some who read with difficulty and could hardly write at all.

So I think it's fair enough to say there are a lot more people out there who want to be writers than there are places for them to sell their work.

This situation may not always remain; with the growth of the new computer lap-top and desktop publishing, there will be a place for everyone to get published. But it may not be fiction that gets published; since about 1920, people have called fiction a dying art form, and given the growth of non-books about diets, confessions of movie stars, revelations from famous athletes or ex-presidents better suited to supermarket tabloids than hard covers, (since they say little about sports or politics that is worth knowing), we can hardly assume fiction markets will grow so much.

Still there are enough would-be writers to make it worth talking to them.

Some people would say "Why teach others to write? There's enough competition already." And others would say talent is so thinly spread on the ground that would-be writers should be actively *dis*couraged. I don't agree.

As I have often said before, no one reading the early clunkers written by me—or Bob Bloch, or Henry Kuttner, or Ray Bradbury—would have known that any of us had anything before we learned to write good ones. Suppose someone had actively discouraged us?

"Writing is easy or it's impossible"

So how to start? I say you will never learn to write a story except by doing it. And I feel very strongly that you must plan your stories before you write them. A common panel at conventions is the beginning writer panel, and someone commented once that they were always looking for a magic formula against rejections.

Well, I am not one of those people who believes in magic formulas or "workshops guaranteed to release your hidden creativity". I always say: when it comes to creativity, you're on your own. But though writing can't be taught, maybe, it can be *learned*; I learned to do it.

Fanny in a bear trap

So how do you do it?

The best way I know of, fitting every story from the ODYSSEY to MOBY DICK or—to be personal—SPELL SWORD, is this; *a likable character overcomes almost overpowering odds to win a worthwhile goal.* Or, more simply, as Jerry Bixby of PLANET STORIES once told me when I was a wet-eared little fan in the slush pile: *Joe has his fanny in a bear trap, and his adventures in getting it out .*

WRITERS

I still check every story I write by those criteria. Or there's another one:

What does your main character want?
What's keeping him from getting it?
Does he/she get it, or doesn't he?

Plotting a story is a little like programming a centipede:

"The centipede was happy until a frog in fun
Asked; Pray, which leg moves after which?
Which raised his thoughs to such a pitch
He fell exhausted in a ditch,
Forgetting how to run."

Writing a story without planning it in advance is like that centipede; he can't walk if he doesn't know where he's going.

You can invent some interesting characters and just write and write hoping they'll get somewhere.

As I see it that's like going from San Francisco to Los Angeles by way of Chicago; any roadmap will show you a more efficient route than that.

A day hardly goes by that someone doesn't write me, or approach me, with a "good idea for a story".

And I say; "Fine; but stories aren't about ideas they're about people."

And what they do, which means figuring out "which leg moves after which." That's really all there is to it. Writing is easy, or it's impossible.

Marion Zimmer Bradley

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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

GUEST EDITORIAL

Was Startling Stories the First Interactive Magazine?

by

Richard A. Lupoff

A Day at the Skywalker Ranch

Not long ago I was invited to spend a day at the Skywalker Ranch in Marin County, visiting the people at the Lucasfilm computer division. They showed me a number of projects they were working on, the most interesting of which was an experimental computer link that would permit multiple users to interact through a shared electronic universe.

The similarities to a number of science fiction writers' concepts—Vernor Vinge's *True Names* and William Gibson's "cyberspace" come to mind—were striking. The demonstration model was still fairly crude, but even so, a user and Chicago and one in Los Angeles could both access a screen here in northern California. Each of them could control a fictitious persona. Those personae could meet in the imaginary or "virtual" world of the computer.

In the demonstration, one user was able to make his persona reach into his pocket, remove an object, and hand it to the other user's persona, who was able to accept the object, look at it, and then place it in her own pocket. This was obviously a pretty crude demo, but the basic concept is sound, and a more sophisticated version of the program might have truly astonishing potential, for good or for harm.

A psychotic or autistic individual might learn to relate to others. The computer would be a tool for therapy.

A neurotic or pathologically shy person might retreat into the computer world and cease to function in the real world. The computer would be a major tool for harm.

A bed-ridden but mentally capable person might learn to live a full life in the "virtual" world.

Potential for good. Potential for harm.

I also looked a variety of software "simulation" packages. These permit you to "fly" a spaceship or an airplane, "drive" a race car, "ride" a horse, "pilot" a speedboat, and so forth. While the interactive world of "virtual" space is still fairly crude, simulation software is relatively advanced. The on-screen graphics and software responsiveness are impressive.

"Interactive Novel" ~ Experience the Novel

My friend Rob Swigart created *Portal*, an "interactive novel" that you can buy in the form of floppy disks. you then experience the novel through your home computer. I say "experience" because you don't just read the novel, you have to interact with and participate in the story. But you don't exactly play it either. *Portal* is not a computer game—that's another kind of beast altogether.

I'd been invited by a software firm to develop a computer-oriented, interactive version of my novel *Circumpolar!* Now *Circumpolar!* is a science-fantasy novel involving (among other things) a round-the-world air race between Charles Lindbergh, Amelia Earhart, and Manfred von Richtoffen, Valkyries on flying horses, giant carnivorous ice-worms, and a bang-up magical duel between a black sorcerer and a kelpie.

Very visual stuff.

It seemed to me that a software package that combined *Portal*-style and virtual-space interactivity with simulator-quality graphics would be spectacular! It would also be practical, and commercially successful.

I was working on such an adaptation of *Circumpolar!* when the company sponsoring the project was practically shut down by its parent conglomerate. Alas—but there may be another chance, one of these days.

Another friend of mine, Mike Farren, has introduced me to the world of interactive computer nets and bulletin boards. Using modems to transmit messages among

many users, a group of science fiction fans have established what amounts to a continuous, real-time, interactive fanzine. Or at least, Mike points out, a letter column. Participants can call up the current contents of the letter column any time they wish, and can add their responses simply by sending them through their modems.

All of this seems to be a wonderful new world. But in fact, it's nothing but a high-tech version of something that's been around for decades!

When I was a young science fiction fan, the old pulp magazines were still in flower, and one of the most appealing features of many of those magazines was the letter column. Whether it was the learned (and, alas, dry as dust) Dr. T. O'Conor Sloane conducting the erudite "Discussions" section of *Amazing Stories* or the garrulous and quarrelsome Sergeant Saturn presiding over "The Reader Speaks" in *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, Dorothy McIlwraith giving readers room in which to plead for more stories by the beloved Seabury Quinn in *Weird Tales* or Mary Gnaedinger soliciting recommendations for reprints in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, practically every magazine in the science fiction, fantasy, and horror fields offered readers a forum. And the readers took advantage of those forums, believe me!

> ***"...many professionals are desperately hungry for the feedback of those old letter columns...editors of the magazine want to hear from you...authors and illustrators as well!"***

"Letterhacking" for the prozines was a recognized form of fan activity, and major fan reputations were made through regular appearances in the letter columns. Whole fannish personae were developed, and editors of the magazines looked forward to effusions from their regulars. People like "Snarly" Siebel, Rick Sneary, and an East Coast fan who signed her letters "Astra" became, in their own ways, figures of national repute.

Letter Columns Develop Careers??

Not only did fan careers develop through the letter columns, but many professional writers got their start by joining the rough-and-tumble of the prozines. Typical letters praised favorite authors and demanded their frequent return, offered accolades or took issue with the contents of particular stories, tossed bouquets to illustrators, or debated such esoteric topics as whether pulp magazines should have smooth or rough edges.

About the only letter column that never interested me was "Brass Tacks" in *Astounding Science Fiction* (the ancestor of today's *Analog*). It always seemed to me that the letter-writers there spent all their time solving equations or discussing the previous issue's editorial or science fact article, and didn't give a hoot about the *stories*. I remember attending a convention at which a fan raised this same point, and Randall Garrett, then a leading *Astounding* author, swore that the magazine would publish letters about authors and stories if only readers would send them in...but that never did change, as far as I know.

Planet Stories ~ 1950

I recently pulled an old pulp magazine off my shelf. It happens to be *Planet Stories* for November 1950. The letter column, "The Vizigraph", features letters from Betsy Curtis, who later contributed a number of splendid stories to *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*; Joe Gibson, who later wrote for *Other Worlds*, *Galaxy*, and other magazines; Ray H. Ramsay, whose non-fiction book *No Longer on the Map* stands to this day as a classic for fantasy scholars; Isaac Asimov, whose career as an author had already begun; Bob Silverberg, whose career was about to begin; Sam Sackett, a college professor and sometime writer who contributed stories to *Imagination*, *Future*, and *Fantastic Story Magazine*; and Mitch Badler, who went on to a distinguished career as a magazine editor outside the fantasy field.

Let's look at a few paragraphs from some of those letters.

Silverberg comments on the previous issue: "The stories? Ah yes, the stories. Coppel did a better-than-fair job on his spaceopera; for once I finished one of his stories straight through to the end and liked it. Jay B. Drexel (*who could this be?* he asked, the soft green radiation from his middle eye falling on those initials) greedily grabs second spot with a cute story. Reminds me of Bradbury in all but the words. Don't consider this flattery soft-soap by any means, Drexel! Didn't read the other stories too carefully, but I liked the Bradbury (who else?) and Abernathy yarns particularly. 'The Sky Is Falling' also sounds like Bradbury (monotonous, the way

these guys imitate Ray, isn't it?). More from Liddell, please. Would like to see some Silverberg in PS too."

Another reader, one Raoul D. Kyne, ends his letter by asking what happened to the previous editor of *Planet Stories*, Bixby having recently taken the helm. Bixby answers, "It was turrible, turrible...Paul Payne got into an argument with Squeedunk, the office BEM, and something he disagreed with ate him."

Ray Ramsay commented on the general direction of *Planet Stories* and science fiction in general. "Every Vizigraph contains a few letters commenting on *Planet's* use of old-time interplanetary adventure fiction, as contrasted with the streamlined 'serious' science story; such comments being hastily qualified with, "That's okay;that's the way I like it.' Stick to your present policies. It may not be long before *Planet's* type of literature will again dominate the field, and the tale of straight science, with its pretenses to serious significance, be in eclipse."

Betsy Curtis commented, "To those who seem to find Bradbury an inferior imitator of the 'expatriates' of the twenties, I'd like to say that Bradbury's ideas seem to me much more interesting than a lot of the earlier stuff and that I'm unwilling to admit, as a drawback to any kind of story, a style which makes the action and surroundings of the story exceedingly vivid."

And so it went. Some of the letter columns were more literate and intelligent than others, some of the fans who wrote in were childish or plain silly, but one way or another they served to knit the populace of fantasy authors, editors, and readers into a functioning community. Historians of the science fiction/fantasy community sometimes pass over the letter columns with a brief mention, finding more of interest in the fan magazine and convention scenes, but in fact the letter columns were a major arena for the recruiting of new fans and for the strengthening of bonds among established fans.

The letter-writers weren't all would-be professionals. not by a long shot! In fact, the point of writing those letters was the fun of the rough-and-tumble, the sense of community, and the thrill of being not merely an observer or consumer but a participant in the whole process of the magazine and the fantasy field.

I'm not offering a guarantee that you'll have a successful career as an author if you'll only send a few letters to the editor of this magazine (or any magazine)—but the percentage of published letter-writers who become successful story-writers is really astonishing. It's an old tradition in the fantasy field, going back at least as far as H. P. Lovecraft's days as a letterhack for the Munsey *Argosy* and *All-Story*, commenting on the Barsoomian adventures of Edgar Rice Burroughs.

And, speaking as one who has long since crossed that crucial line from fan to pro, I can tell you that many professionals are desperately hungry for the feedback of those old letter columns. The late James Blish once told me that when he wrote a story for a pulp like *Future* or *Fantastic* he could count on a strong sampling of fan/reader reaction in later issues of the magazine. But when most of the pulps died off and Blish moved on to writing books, the reader response dried up to almost nothing.

"You can sell 50,000 copies of a novel," Blish told me, "and get as few as one or two or three letters—sometimes none at all."

He really missed those reader responses, and I can tell you today that I wish I could have them myself. Writing stories is a good deal like making love. You *can* do it all by yourself, but it's a lot more interesting and miles more enjoyable if you're connected with somebody else at the time.

"And don't feel that you're not eloquent enough, not literary enough, not 'with it' enough for your letter to be of interest... You are the audience for whom they perform their art."

Complete the Circuit

You don't need a computer and a modem to be interactive. Just send a letter to the editor when you finish reading this issue of *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine*. You'll complete the circuit...connect with the editors and authors and illustrators...and become a real and vital part of the magazine!

Whatever you do, don't feel that you're intruding. The editors of the magazine want to hear from you, the authors and illustrators want to , as well! And don't feel that you're not eloquent enough, not literary enough, not "with it" enough for your letter to be of interest to them. You are the customer to whom they have to sell their product, the audience for whom they perform their art.

They want to hear from you. They need to hear from you!

I can guarantee that your letter will be welcomed—and so will you!

❧*Richard A. Lupoff*

MZB*fm*

LETTERS

Dear Readers,

When I first contemplated this magazine, one thing I wanted to be sure and do was to run a letter column. The field of speculative fiction has evolved as it has, I am sure, because of the feedback given to writers from their fans, and because this is one field where fellow writers do not think of one another as *competition*, but as colleagues. Every other genre seems to have grown up without input from readers; if letter columns appeared in a Western magazine, they were inarticulate comments of the "I like your old magazine" type without much individuality; but the letter columns of the s-f magazines contained articulate, critical (sometimes very critical) letters and the columns looked, sometimes, like a roster of today's SFWA. I have sometimes felt that about every third fan wants to be a writer; and this was possible because so many of us learned, through writing letters, to express ourselves as fluently and easily on paper as in person—sometimes more so.

People just don't seem to *write* letters these days; what with the telephone, video and computers, people sometimes say we are a postliterate society.

I know it's trendy to make fun of fans these days. I don't agree; that's why I'm running this magazine; because I am print addicted. Maybe I belong to a previous generation; but I believe in reading, and writing.

But I can't do it without your help.

MZB

CAN'T CHOOSE STORIES

I wanted to tell you that it's impossible to choose between those stories; they're all 10s in my book. I liked no one more than the others.

Lara Unger, Fenton, MI

NO POINTY EARED ELVES

Please note the error in the address; it's a miracle that it arrived via Yogzipcode. For your mailing timing; I just received it though I subscribed at Baycon—Memorial Day.

I lent my copy to a budding fantasy writer and fan next door, so I cannot send in your Cauldron yet, but so far I'm surprised and pleased by the quality of prose, much of the artwork, and as to layout and typesetting, very good indeed. Your Macintosh wizard seems to have discovered many of the techniques that I have, missed a few, and I admit that I picked up a couple of layout techniques from him. (More info on request; in fact, I'd be privileged to handle your overflow work on my system.)

[Thank you for your offer; we were very fortunate to have Curtis Stoddard of Santa Rosa, who by slaving night and day on his Macintosh, helped take this magazine from fantasy to reality. We literally could not have done it without him. JLB]

Poul Anderson's essay was the best I have ever read on that subject; on that basis, I'm asking him to do an expanded version for an upcoming New Libertarian.

And MZB's remarks and editorials were remarkable fannish; as the fringies engulf our last bastions with giant robots and pointy-eared elves, I for one appreciate it.

Samuel Edward Konkin, III,
Santa Monica, CA

COMMENTS ON STORIES

Today my Premier Issue came in the mail. I immediately read it from cover to cover, and heartily enjoyed myself every step of the way. It was truly a shadow-splashed, sun-dappled collection.

Then came the last page—the one where I was asked to choose my single, most favorite! Ouch! Unfair! How could I possibly choose only one when they were all so good?

How to choose? What criteria—the most evocative line, the most memorable story, the most fascinating characters?

"Final Exam" by Jennifer Roberson: will I ever again see or hear a frog without visions of a laid-back vegetarian dragon deadpanning "Oh, one of those"? And speaking of dragons, what about "Luck of the Draw"? Whump! The dragon's head smacked the hard ground. I laughed till the tears flowed. Will an ordinary dragon ever again do, now that I've been exposed to one with uneven red and black stripes that don't even have the common decency to go in the right direction?

And still speaking of dragons, Paula Helm Murray's "The Dragon and the Sword": Dragon and Nym—what happens next? Don't leave me hanging, I want to know more, and more after that.

What did I decide? I decided that accolades were most definitely in order for all who were involved in this most noble endeavor.

Teresa Thomas Bohannon Johnson City, TN

[We received enough letters like this that *Cauldron* has been redesigned for you to vote for your favorite stories. MZB.]

HIGH-CLASS & PROFESSIONAL—WERE THERE PAGES MISSING FROM MOONRISE???

What a gorgeous magazine! I like the size; the cover is fantastic; all in all, it's a very high-class, professional job. May it last forever and show up on every newsstand.

I missed the point of "Moonrise" and so cannot comment on it intelligently, except to wonder if some pages were missing. It was very hard to rank the others; it was a tossup between "The Vision" and "Final Exam".

Poul Anderson's "Imagination and Reasons" was excellent. So was the "Trialogue". I liked especially the thumbnail distinction between horror and fantasy, whether the unknown is terrifying or awe-inspiring.

Keep up the good work.

Pat Mathews, Albuquerque, NM

[The point of "Moonrise" was that since the astronauts took the magic out of the moon, thereby curing the young werewolf, landing on Mars would take the warlike qualities out of it, so the "fighting would stop". Don't we wish! MZB]

A LOVE OF WORDS

Your triangular-tale discussion of fantasy, and your hints to writers gave me definitely to think: Do you think it's a love of words as such that moves writers. With me, a story starts with a situation—usually with pictures. I guess I like to create an interesting flow of words, but even so, words are the stuff you use to make this particular form of creation. The crossword puzzle analogy was what made me think this. I've worked a few, but never got enthusiastic. By analogy, I think there must be rather few great painters who started with a voluptuous thrill of smearing paint around.

I liked Mr. Anderson's pointing out the need for logic when writing about fantastic places and situations. The story about the flying castle was one I couldn't believe in: they picked up the Fairmont Hotel here in San Antonio, a four-storey stone building and carried it several blocks and around several corners and set it down where they wanted it, and we all turned out in thousands to watch. When I think about it now, that occurs to me as a fantastic thing, but for that reason that flying castle was too much.

One more point and then I'll shut up; 2 subscriptions and 700 submissions for a new magazine is indeed a horror story. It is that any kind of artist, in any medium, has this compulsion to have some of one's fellows share one's work. I don't think it's wicked-sinfulpride either, as the little nuns would say. It's just because at a very deep level we are all, well, fellows. I don't think there's anyone who creates anything who doesn't finish and have the impulse to run out of the house shouting "Look! Look! Look what I've made!"

(It's safe to say that, because if there are any, they won't be in evidence.)

With the ease, good quality and cheapness of copiers today, I wonder that there aren't more writers who take that route to give copies of their work to their friend. Gods, they used to do that in the Renaissance, when it had to be done by hand.

Polly Johnson San Antonio, TX

[That's what publishing is all about; to circulate good stuff in greater quantity than it could be done otherwise. MZB]

And that's all for this time; rest assured, we read every one of your letters, even the little notes some of you scribbled on the bottoms of your ballots. We can't print them all, for reasons related to the inelasticity of regular typeface; why doesn't somebody invent rubber paper? All letters should be sent to this column; we reserve the right to edit for length and clarity. We will not print anonymous letters.

MZB.

CONTRIBUTORS

LYNNE ARMSTRONG-JONES (no relation to Lord Snowden—in fact she's Canadian, from Ontario) is a psychometrist by occupation, giving psychological tests to school children. A continuing interest in sf and fantasy culminated when she bought a word processor and realized that if what was on the shelf didn't meet with her approval, she could write on her own. Her first novel was handwritten in a school notebook; she has persisted in writing ever since, and is a fine example of what I say about persistence—when one story is rejected, just write another one. Of course, some people keep on submitting stories without ever improving; but the chances are that if a writer keeps at it, and takes criticism as an opportunity to improve, sooner of later the editor will get tired of rejecting the stories. She spends a lot of time walking (she says she does a lot of mental writing that way), and, in her spare time, follows the travels of the Toronto Blue Jays.

JOHN BETANCOURT says he got his love for writing from his mother, who was an English teacher. Although born in Missouri, he was brought up in New Jersey. He has been selling fiction since he was seventeen; he has several books in print and forthcoming, and is one of a triumvirate of editors publishing the newly revitalized version of *Weird Tales*, which in its day was the most prestigious of pulp magazines.

STEPHEN C. FISHER was (at least partially) named after the popular mystery writer of the forties, of the same name (no relation, though). He lives in Philadelphia, plays the viola in several amateur ensembles, and publishes serious and weighty articles on musicology, about which he says he has discovered that "that and a token will get him a ride on the trolley." This is his second professional fiction sale, and he has several other stories in the works. We'll be waiting for them.

DOROTHY HEYDT, who appeared in our first issue with the hysterically funny *Moonrise*, returns this issue by popular demand—the demand of all editors for good fiction. She is no stranger to the readers of *Sword and Sorceress*, having appeared in many of those volumes. She makes her home in Berkeley with her husband, young children, and several cats and computers.

T. JACKSON KING appeared with his early writings in "PULPHOUSE REPORT", a non-commercial newsletter. He has recently sold two novels to Questar. He says he likes "most any novel with good science, good aliens, and a good human-aline theme." Who doesn't? He says he writes to entertain, and "leave the reader with some food for thought." He has lived in many states, and dreams of someday visiting every country in the world.

TERRY O'BRIEN is a computer systems analyst and programmer, and for ten years has been learning the ins and outs of writing software, in various languages and different systems. He is now doing the same for writing science fiction and fantasy. He is also an active fan. (Well, that's how I started.) This is his first professional sale.

SUSAN SHWARZ appeared first in *The Keeper's Price* (Daw 1980) and her first anthology, *Hecate's Cauldron*, was nominated for the World Fantasy Award. She has edited several anthologies and written six or seven novels. Her lead story for this issue struck us as having a visual quality which made it perfect for a cover story. She works as a financial advisor at a Wall Street brokerage house; I didn't know quite what that was, and she advised me that I didn't want to know. She has also appeared in many magazines, from *Analog* to *Amazing*, and has written criticism for the *New York Times*.

PAUL ZIMMER happens to be my brother, thirteen years younger, so I got to influence his reading habits, and bring him up in the way he should go: reading fantasy. He is the author of two novels for Playboy, in a series called *The Dark Border*, and has also written short fiction and poetry for various anthologies. He is also the father of our artist, Fiona Zimmer.

RICHARD A. LUPOFF "who has long since crossed that crucial line from fan to pro" is another computer wizard who spent twelve years doing software development for Sperry and IBM. His first book, *Edgar Rice Burroughs: Master of Adventure*, was published in 1965. He has been a full-time writer since 1970. His recent novels include *The Forena City*, *The Black Tower*, *Galaxy's End*, and *The Comic Book Killer*. He lives in Berkeley with his wife Pat, three cats, and two dogs.

JAYGE CARR started writing on a dare. One evening, angry at what she was reading—let us not Name Names or Point accusing Fingers—she tossed the book across the room and snarled, "I could write a better book than *that*." Her other half, working at his desk, looked up and said (was he joking?), "Why don't you? Ms. Carr has produced several books, including the SF Book Club selection, *Leviathan's Deep*, and the Jael the Navigator series.

At the End of the Rainbow:

Vote For Your Favorite Story

* *please note selection process below*

Every professional writer wishes that there were better pay in the field. Except for a few superstars, nobody gets rich writing science fiction or fantasy. Most of us, for the first few years at least, do it because we love it. But writing is a business; and we like to offer incentives. Won't you take just a minute now to tear (or cut) this form out of the magazine, and vote for the story you liked best? We will pay a bonus to the winner of this popular vote.

* **To Vote**: *please enter one (for your most favorite story), two (for your next favorite), and three (for your third favorite)...*

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by Susan Shwartz
page 5

Dreamtime in Adjaphon ☐
by John Gregory Betancourt
page 21

Hitchhiker ☐
by Jayge Carr
page 27

The Lady, The Wizard and the Thing ☐
by Lynne Armstrong-Jones
page 31

Mary Rose and the Devil ☐
by Stephen C. Fisher
page 48

Mistaking the Dragon Mage ☐
by Terry O'Brien
page 52

Paradox Lost ☐
by Dorothy J. Heydt
page 16

The Vision of Aldamir ☐
by Paul Edwin Zimmer
page 39

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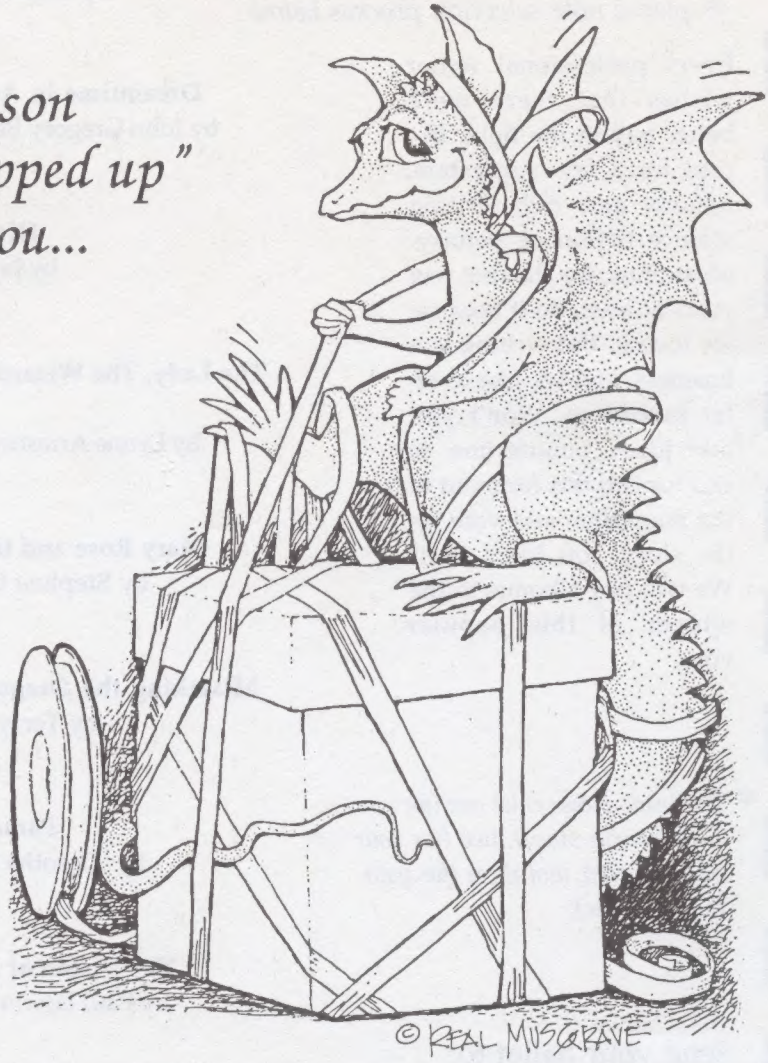

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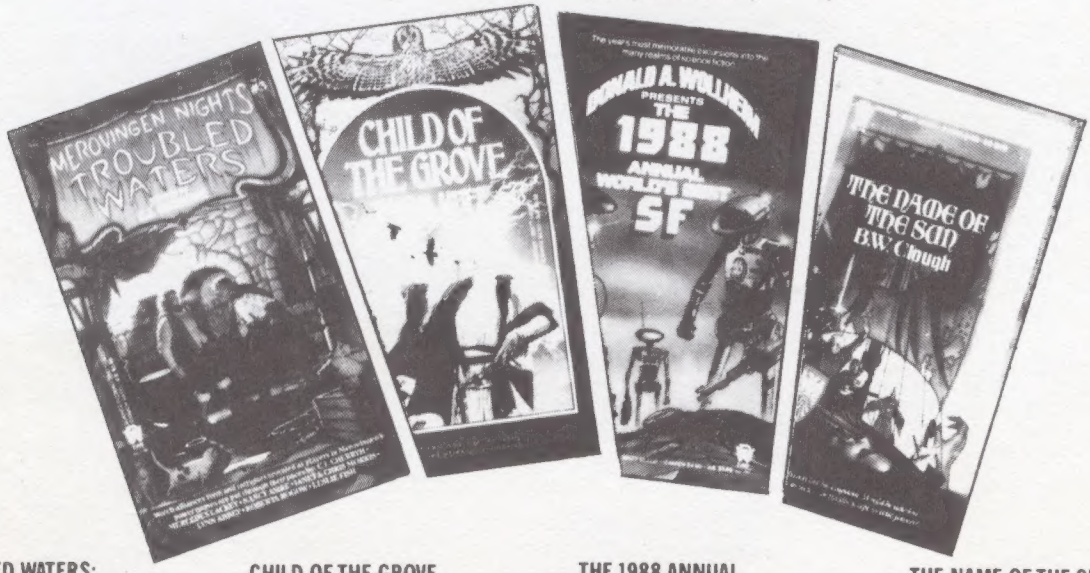
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0-88677-282-6 Fantasy/Original
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THE WARRIORS OF SPIDER
by W. Michael Gear

The Prophets of the lost colony planet called "World" could see the many pathways of the future, and when the conquering Patrol Ships of the galaxy-spanning Directorate arrived, they found the warriors of World ready, armed—and waiting!

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SWORD SINGER
by Jennifer Roberson

Outlawed for slaying her sword-master, Del must return to the Place of Swords to stand in sword-dancer combat and either clear her name or meet her doom. But behind Tiger and Del stalks an unseen enemy, intent on stealing the very heart and soul of their sword-magic!

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THE OATHBOUND
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United by sword-spell and the Goddess, Tarma and Kethry—one a master swordswoman, the other a powerful sorceress—swore a blood oath to carry on their mutual fight againt evil...and together, they set forth to fulfill their destiny!

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SHADOW OF THE WARMASTER
by Jo Clayton

Her daughter kidnapped, Adelaar hires troubleshooter Quale and his piratical crew to search the starways on a trail three years cold—a trail that will lead them to a planet of dread secrets and desperate rebellion—a land where death's shadow orbits endlessly overhead, awaiting only the Imperator's command to begin its merciless rain of destruction...

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SNOW-EYES
by Stephanie A. Smith

When the mysterious mother who abandoned her returns to claim Snow-Eyes for the goddess known as the Lake Mother, Snow-Eyes is compelled to go with her to the citadel at the heart of the lake. And it is there that Snow-Eyes learns the full depths of her mother's treachery—a treachery that will lead Snow-Eyes to a confrontation with Lord Death himself.

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by Zach Huges

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(Merovingen Nights #4)
edited by C.J. Cherryh

In debt to the hightown Boregys, approached by the Boregys' rivals, and blackmailed by the fanatic Sword of God, Thomas Mondragon faces a narrowing circle of enemies as he is bound still more tightly in the affairs of the Great Houses—and even the canals have become unfriendly territory as religious mania threatens hightowners and canalsiders alike.

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